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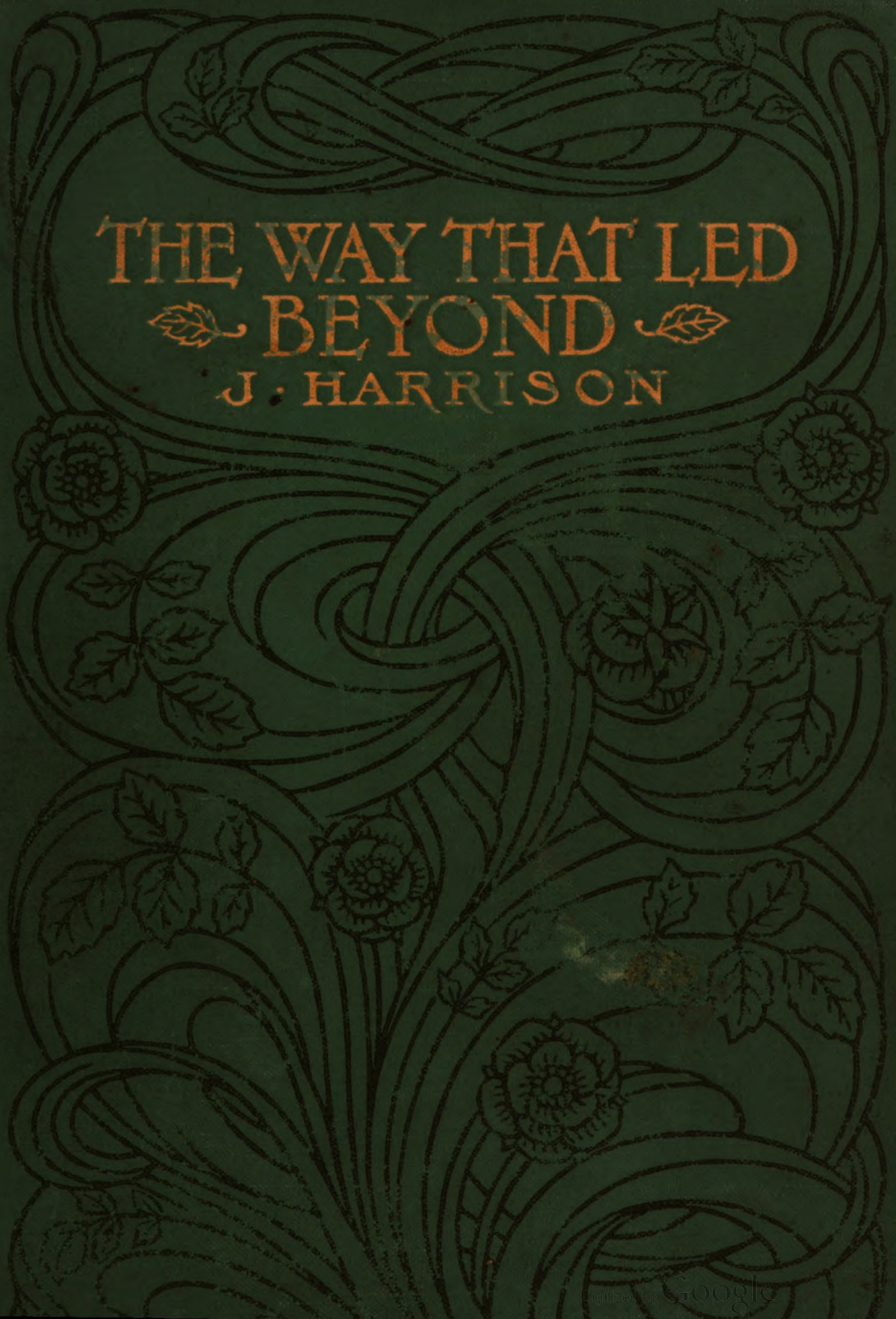
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THE WAY THAT LED
BEYOND
J. HARRISON



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THE WAY THAT LED BEYOND.

BY J. HARRISON,

Author of "Kind Hearts and Coronets."



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THE WAY THAT LED BEYOND.

CHAPTER I.

GOING "HOME."

THE guard was a stout man with a red face, and he had a queer way of puffing out his words, one at a time. Had the ordinary number of passengers crowded the cars there would have been the usual number of comments on the thin, wheezy voice in such a great big body.

"Birmingham next!" he called, as the train came to a halt at the little wayside station.

There were a half-dozen listeners—no more. Trains from New York to the White Mountains are not crowded at Thanksgiving time. Suddenly the guard, busy with the lights, dropped them, bending over to assist a slim young lady to climb up the steps that led to the platform. Perhaps this civility was due, in great part, to the fact that the light from those same lanterns had fallen on a witching pair of blue eyes, raised to his confidently before she placed her foot on the step. Entering the car, she sat down near the door, putting a leather dressing-case she carried on the seat beside her, and throwing a costly fur muff on top of it.

"This is much nicer," she said, musingly. "More secluded. Wonder what Dick will say when he gets that telegram? That one woman knows how to keep her word, I suppose!" She

laughed. "Traveling is so monotonous, and so tiresome—when one travels alone."

She did not look at all tired as she removed the small fur toque from her head, and arranged her blonde hair. That done, she glanced about her with a little shiver. There was no one near her. The guard put his head in, curiously—he seldom saw so charming a picture, even though, in the busy season, he met many pretty women. And this guard had an eye for beauty. Phyllis beckoned to him.

"We won't have to wait here *very* long?" she asked.

The girl was a coquette. The red-faced man flushed a deeper red at the uncalled-for sweetness of tone, the lingering glance of blue, the smile that parted the young lips.

"Ten minutes here—an express passes us. Have you your ticket? Segrovia—that is the last stop. It will be two hours and a half—"

"Two hours and a half longer?" Phyllis frowned and tapped her foot. Then she took the ticket from his fingers and smiled again.

"Thank you."

A little embarrassed, not so much at the courteous tone as at the irresistible glance that accompanied it, he walked toward the door. She settled herself more comfortably, wriggling around in her seat, and using her muff as a sort of support at the back to make her position easier. She looked very childish and very beautiful, the collar of the fur jacket she wore clinging close to the delicate roundness of throat and cheek.

"Dear me," she mused, "in two hours and a half I shall be at the back of nowhere—with my aunt, the Honorable Mrs. Browne. Mary Browne, relict of the late Thomas John Browne!

What a truly inspiring name! Countrified? I can see her—long curls, nose glasses, thin lips and all. I shall be expected to call her Aunt Mary, I suppose. Aunt Mary! Well, she'll see."

There was something besides childishness in the glittering blue eyes now, and the red lips hardened rebelliously. Then as she turned her head to the window, a slight rustle of skirts attracted her attention. As if framed within the door a tall figure in black stood for an instant. The newcomer glanced up and down the car rapidly, not seeing the fair-haired girl at first, and then when she did, drawing back with an involuntary movement of displeasure. Quickly recovering herself, however, she advanced down the aisle, putting her small hand-satchel into the rack above her head, and then seated herself with the easy composure and that lack of restlessness which show the experienced traveler.

Phyllis Gordon, as we may as well begin to call her, had not misunderstood that first expression, and she resented it, glancing at the girl haughtily as she sat down, measuring her as strangers do when chance brushes one against the other. The train started. Dusk had settled on the surrounding country—there was no light to see the wide, level fields through which they passed. Here and there the faint outline of a house appeared. The distant mountains approached nearer and ever nearer, until at last it seemed to Phyllis that they were cutting right through them. She put her cheek to the cold pane and gave herself up to thought. In a moment she was far away—back in a scene of delight. She stood before her mirror, dressed in a simple little gown that made her doubly beautiful she knew, with *his* roses in her hair and at her belt. She was down in the long and brilliant drawing-room, with *his* hand holding her fan and his eyes looking into hers with his heart in them. What a night that was—what a glorious night!

Yet with all its sweetness the memory must have been sad, for after a while the tears gathered heavily on her lashes and found their way to her cheeks. Feeling them, she put up her handkerchief hurriedly, glancing at her companion to see if she had noticed. But the other's eyes were averted—even as Phyllis' own had been, staring fixedly out of the window, while her hands rested lightly and idly in her lap. She had removed her hat as if its weight hurt her and had not replaced it. And Phyllis, after that first stolen glance, could not take her gaze away. The profile was so calm, so quiet, the black lashes so immovable. It was strange to see such repose in a woman, especially in this land of nervous, unquiet women. The well-developed figure was clad in a gown of black cloth trimmed with a narrow edging of fur, and from her throat, suspended by a fine gold chain, hung a diamond cross. Her breath did not stir it—it seemed part of her in the strange repose that seemed to enwrap her from head to foot. The hands lying so quiet and still fairly shone in their delicacy. How old was she, wondered Phyllis—a woman's first wonder when another woman seems to have passed into the years of discretion (which for some are twenty, and which others do not reach ten years after twenty). So that this quiet creature might be anywhere between the two. Where did she come from? Was she maid or wife or widow? For whom was she in mourning—and if she were in mourning, went on Phyllis, with the fashionable leaning toward ultraism, why did she wear that diamond cross so conspicuously?

And as she gazed, in addition to the wonder, great admiration grew upon her, so that when, almost compelled by that steady scrutiny, the dark-haired stranger turned her head, Phyllis could not bear to drop her eyes, but kept on staring—until suddenly she recollected the rudeness of it. Perhaps it was the sorrow in

the deep eyes that brought Phyllis to herself. She begged her pardon quickly then, and had the grace to blush.

The lids drooped wearily—nor would she seem to acknowledge Phyllis' softly spoken words even by this. It appeared almost as if the outside world were immaterial—beyond her care or her attention. Phyllis felt shut out, ignored. It was a new sensation.

"Can you tell me when we will arrive at Segrovia?" she ventured, timidly. "I am traveling through here for the first time and I assure you that I am quite at sea."

The stranger opened her eyes and looked at the girl a full second before answering. Then in a clear, distinct voice she made answer:

"Two hours, now, I believe. I, also, am traveling this way for the first time."

"You are going to Segrovia?" questioned Phyllis, eagerly.

Again the stranger hesitated—something like a sigh passing her lips. Perhaps it was the childishness of the young face near her that turned the sigh into a faint smile, freeing it from the resentment that stirred her at being drawn into an unwelcome conversation. She murmured:

"Yes."

"Oh, it is a dreary, dreadful, awful place in winter," said Phyllis.

"It is not your home, then?" the stranger asked, softly, letting her eyes seek the darkness beyond the window-pane. Phyllis leaned forward. There was something so musical in the intonation—the word "home" lingered so lovingly upon her tongue.

"God forbid!" said Phyllis, then. "New York City is my birthplace. Oh—but that is too good to be true!—you may be a New Yorker?"

Again that faint, tremulous smile.

"It is too good to be true," said the stranger. "I was born in Italy."

"An artist!" thought Phyllis. "I might have known that." Then, aloud: "You were born in Italy and speak English so perfectly?"

"I am an Italian by birth only."

"Oh! Your people are English, then?"

The curiosity, the unfeigned interest, were amusing.

"No," smiling. "My parents were Americans. My father was born in Segrovia—where I am going. I am going home!"

Was it fancy, or did a deeper note come to the full throat, a brighter gleam to the somber eyes? Did the dark head curve itself suddenly, as if the heart of the woman had grown lighter and more daring and more courageous?

"Going home!" laughed Phyllis. "To Segrovia—to that forsaken place? No, no, not after Italy—not after the blue Italian skies that you have known! You will not stay."

"Every land has its attractions."

"Maybe," said the girl, wisely. "I believe the attractions of this beautiful country consist in four or five inhabitants—on whom one can call, I mean—the rest do not count; endless snow, great blizzards, bitter cold. Do you think you could stand all that?"

"It is my will to do so," said the stranger.

"Your will?" and now it was Phyllis' turn to look upon her vis-a-vis with an affectation of superiority. "You think you can do what you wish—just because you will to do so?" She laughed softly. "There must be some other attraction."

The stranger shrugged her shoulders with gentle impatience.

"I do not know a soul there," she said. "Not a soul. But I

will stay there, and I will live there, and I will be happy there, because my father lived there and was happy, happy. I, too, would be happy—and content," she repeated, under her breath.

"But who will buy your pictures?" asked Phyllis, sagely. "You can scarcely expect to find art-lovers among the four or five acceptable inhabitants. I daresay if they ever loved art they have outgrown so obsolete a characteristic—for Segrovia—by this time."

"Art-lovers? Pictures?" echoed the stranger.

"Surely you're an artist?"

The stranger laughed outright.

"No," she said. "I am not an artist."

Phyllis' beautiful face lighted up enthusiastically.

"An—actress, maybe?" she said.

For a moment the natural whiteness of the stranger's face seemed ghastly.

"I am not an actress," she responded, quietly. "Although I have been called so."

"I should have taken you for something of that sort," insisted Phyllis.

"I am nothing—of that sort." Again the stranger's eyes sought the darkness, as if seeking rest there. "I have been—a musician."

There was silence. Even Phyllis, curious as she was concerning this enigmatical being, could see that she did not care to converse with her. The stranger roused herself at last.

"I beg your pardon," she said, apologetically. "But I am apt to lose a thread of speech in the labyrinth of my thoughts. You were saying—?"

"Nothing," returned Phyllis. "But you said that you had

been a musician. And I—you will pardon me for my frankness? Surely you can not have been a musician without being one now."

"I have given it up."

"Because—it does not pay?"

"What a sordid question for one so young in years!" said the stranger, evasively.

"A sordid question!" and Phyllis' lips tightened. "Sordid?" she repeated. "If you knew—or do you know?—how fate schools orphaned children who are heirs to naught but healthy mother-wit, so that they may find a way in the world, and finding, scheme to fill it and to hold it. I am young in years—I am young of face—but my heart is old. My feelings will never run away with me, for my brain is the dominant power. Believe me, I shall manage exceedingly well. If you do not care to tell me about your music," she went on, her manner changing abruptly, "do not do so. I am interested, really, but that doesn't matter."

"Oh!" said the stranger. There was an expression akin to pity on her face as she looked straight into the young girl's eyes. "I have played since my babyhood, almost. With my only brother. We traveled all over the world together. He has been dead a year. . . . I have not appeared in public—since."

"You must surely love it."

"Unspeakably. But my brother— He was my twin soul. . . . Since he went away— I love it, but it saddens me. The joy of it is not for me. The joy of it tells me—I am—alone!"

Phyllis was silent. The words, dreamy, incoherent, broken, were not meant for her ears. They were forced through the semblance of outward calm by powerful emotion.

"I gave up the best part of me," said the stranger. "But it is my will."

"Our characters are somewhat alike, then," said Phyllis, more to break in upon the painful thoughts that she could see were beginning to absorb her companion. "But what in all the world will such a woman as you do—at Segrovia?"

"Learn to work."

"Learn to work!" Phyllis brought her hands together. "You travel from Italy—you, a musician and a clever woman—to Segrovia to learn to work! Why not remain in the city, the great, big, wide, beautiful city—where you will have a chance to attain some position—"

There was a sudden grinding of the wheels—a sudden stoppage of motion that sent a shock through the cars, and almost threw Phyllis from her seat. The words died on her lips. She clutched at the framework of the window, and her face grew pale. The stranger's features did not change their expression. She still looked at Phyllis inquiringly.

"There is something the matter," said Phyllis.

"Perhaps not. This is a bad time of the year to travel in these mountainous districts."

There were voices of men along the tracks, and lanterns swinging rapidly from side to side. This went on for about ten minutes. The few passengers who occupied the other end of the car glanced up sleepily, and dozed off again. The red-faced guard came through. Phyllis hailed him.

"This is not Segrovia?" she called.

"No, miss," he said. He lingered beside them.

"What is it?" asked the stranger, very quietly. "Snow-bound? Derailed? Some impediment on the tracks?"

He looked at her, surprised at the quiet voice.

"Owing to the snow the engineer was going easy—it's but a

crawl up-hill from this to Segrovia," said the man. "He saw the boulder just in time. A massive thing—over half a ton. It must have been an avalanche brought that down the embankment. If we were thrown off the track here it would have been a clear fall to the ravine."

"Very far below?" asked the stranger.

The guard shrugged his shoulders.

"Two hundred feet at least."

"A narrow escape. Thank God," said the girl, involuntarily. "Will we be detained long?"

"An hour at least."

"That means two hours," said Phyllis, petulantly. "We won't get to Segrovia until long after dark."

The stout conductor looked at her in surprise—then walked away toward the other occupants of the car.

"That is a bad habit," said the stranger.

"What?" asked Phyllis.

"Grumbling at trifles. How long do you think you would have been detained had we gone over into the ravine?"

Phyllis shuddered.

"I did not think of that. It is a shame. I can't for the life of me see why railroad companies don't guard their tracks—"

"Oh, hush," said the stranger, contemptuously. "Say a prayer of thankfulness that God has preserved your life. Or at least be silent until I say one."

Phyllis did not resent the tone—it made her ashamed, rather. Presently, when the stranger turned her face upon her again, she met the penitent blue eyes more kindly.

"Let us go outside—it is not cold, and we have been sitting still so long."

"Yes," said Phyllis. "I shall be glad to." They found the conductor passing. He helped them to the ground and advised them not to walk very far, as they did not know that section of the country and it was late for two women to venture anywhere. The stranger did not reply, but Phyllis, grown meek, thanked him.

"There is a house on the top of that hill," said the stranger, suddenly. She spoke in a louder tone, and addressed the man. "It is not far—do you think we might venture that?"

The man turned to look.

"Oh, yes," he said. "You can make that in five minutes."

"Why do you want to go there?" asked Phyllis.

"Because I can not even walk aimlessly," was the reply. "I must have an objective point. My intention now is to go to that house on the hill, the house with the light in the window. Then I shall have the train to reach from there. You still care to come?"

"Anywhere," said Phyllis. Then she smiled, her natural, careless mood restored. "Though I would not want to take a five minutes' walk so seriously as you."

CHAPTER II.

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL.

"I HAVE read somewhere of the valley of the shadow," said Phyllis, suddenly. "This is all shadow—I wonder if the light of the moon ever reaches here?"

"It does, it must," said her companion. "If we could but wait to see it when the glory of the moonlight fills it! But we shall be far away then."

"And to us it will only be the valley of the shadow," said Phyllis. The youth seemed to have left her face—it was cold; one could hardly read the expression of the clear blue eyes, the tightly-closed lips. The stranger did not care just then to be observant. Their feet crunched on the frozen path, and with the swift steps of perfect health and youth and strength they swung along under the stripped branches of the trees, swaying slowly with their ghostly arms in the still, cold air. The path was well-defined—for the snow that covered it stretched white and crystallized before them.

"We shall soon reach our objective point," said Phyllis, with a laugh. "It is coming nearer. But we have walked more than five minutes."

"About eight—it will be ten by the time we reach it—and it will take ten to go back. What a peculiar light that is shining from the window. Perhaps—"

"I should love to see who could occupy such a lonely dwelling-house," said Phyllis, eagerly. "I am going to ring."

"And when they open—"

"I shall ask for a drink of water. Here we are—will you come with me?"

She could find no bell, but discovered a big knocker, and struck it several times. There was no answer.

"Yet some one lives here," said Phyllis, in a vexed tone. "There surely must be some one. Wait—I'll find a chink in the curtain."

Half-smiling, the stranger followed the girl to where the light streamed out across the road down into the valley like a star. Phyllis, peeping through the window, brought her hands together with a little exclamation of triumph.

"Look, look!" she said. "Isn't that a wonderful sight?"

A man was sitting at a table in the center of the room. His book lay open before him—he had evidently fallen asleep while reading it. He was in evening attire, and the lamp, shaded by a green globe, giving the peculiar effect of light the stranger had noticed, rested in such a position that its rays fell on a handsome, fair face—the face of a gentleman.

"A treasure-trove in the wilderness!" cried Phyllis, delighted beyond measure. "Who ever, ever, *ever* could think of finding this in the house on the hill?"

Smiling at her childish excitement, the dark-eyed stranger bent to look. The next moment she seized Phyllis' arm in a grip of iron.

"Come," she said, and her voice shook. "In the name of God, girl, come away."

"What—"

"Nothing, nothing, nothing," said the stranger. "Hush, hush—not a breath. He will hear you, and sooner— The house

on the hill, the house on the hill! Oh, what brought me here—what evil fate tempted me to come this way!”

Bewildered, dazed, almost frightened, Phyllis allowed herself to be dragged by that stranger-hand out into the road again and down once more into the snow-encrusted valley. Excitement seemed to lend wings to the other's feet. Phyllis caught her breath.

“I—can not—walk—so—quickly,” she said, at last.

“Poor little thing!” The stranger moderated her steps immediately. “I had forgotten you.”

Her brows were curved, her eyes shining with a strange light. Phyllis was afraid of her—afraid of the silence and the mystery.

“I would not want to live here—this is so lonely, so quiet. I could not stand being alone,” she said, after a moment. “I wish I had not called this the valley of the shadow—it seems like a foreboding.”

“I mounted it to my Calvary,” said the stranger, in a bitter tone. “I put away my cross—and lo! my cross has come to me. Oh, child, if it is true that death only comes with terror to those who travel the paths of life easily—but to those who must strive ever on that steep hill, he comes like a gentle angel to touch the brow with happiness! Come to me!” She threw her arms out suddenly and stood still. “God, if it is Thy will, let the death angel come now—come soon.”

The passion in the low voice startled Phyllis. They were almost at the train—and as if impelled by an involuntary movement, both turned to look up at the house with its light shining out on the path beyond. And then the stranger spoke, more quietly.

“God's will be done.”

The guard came up to them.

"We start immediately, ladies," he said. "Everything is all right, now."

Neither answered—both were thinking too deeply. Once more Phyllis felt her arm clutched in that tight grasp, and then, following her companion's glance, she saw that the light had been extinguished. The next moment they were back in the train, and the wheels began to move; very slowly at first—then with increasing speed. Phyllis gazed curiously at her companion. The quiet of the white face seemed undisturbed—but there were black shadows under the eyes, that had not been present when they left the car twenty minutes before.

* * * * *

They had not exchanged a word for a full half-hour. Gradually the stranger recovered her calmness of demeanor. Phyllis, feeling that she had been on the verge of a mystery, and inwardly consumed with curiosity, still did not dare to venture a question. The other must speak, some time, and she would take the cue from her.

The other did speak. She turned to her, smiling naturally.

"When we were interrupted by the delay," she said, "you mentioned New York. The great, big, wide, beautiful city of New York—where one has a chance to attain position—"

Phyllis stared at her, open-mouthed.

"How can you remember?" she asked.

"I have a splendid memory."

"Yes," said Phyllis, slowly. She waited a few moments, looking at the stranger with critical eyes. "You said, I believe, that you were going to Segrovia to learn to work?" And then in a tone of utter contempt, "Work!"

"Why not?" asked the stranger. "I am not seeking position. At Segrovia live my father's two sisters—my only living relatives. I never needed them before."

"And you need them—now?" asked Phyllis, incredulously. "No."

"My brother was everything to me—father, brother, mother, confidant, friend—I can not stay out in the world without him. It is too full of bitter experiences."

"I know," said Phyllis, and her tone was very soft, and her blue eyes dim with tears. "It is full of bitter experiences."

Her voice touched a chord of sympathy.

"I must have something to hold on to," continued the stranger, in the dreamy tone that struck so pleasantly on Phyllis' listening ears. "I want to feel that I belong to some one—and that some one belongs to me. I am only a lonely woman on a lonely earth, and I can not bear it. It was a wicked atmosphere—that into which my art would have led me. My pride bade me brave it, dare it, but my soul was sick. I could not stand the society of those who listened to me to-day with simulated rapture, and to-morrow slandered me, with cruel, cruel tongues. But what can a child like you know of such meanness and such malice?"

"What do I know?" echoed Phyllis, with a discordant laugh. "Much. You seek your relatives to avoid meanness and malice? My relatives bestow both upon me in plenty. Your art has been all in all to you. I have had no art but the study of human nature to fit my purpose in life. Perhaps at Segrovia I shall have a chance to prove it to you!" Tears were standing in her eyes.

"We are acquainted, now," said the stranger, gently. "And, since our destination is the same, likely to know more of each other. What is your name?"

"Phyllis Gordon."

"Gordon? There is a Mrs. Edward Gordon in New York—"

"My Aunt Isabel—yes."

"Your aunt? Is that so? I have met Mrs. Gordon on one or two occasions." Her face darkened. "My name is Xaviera Pomeroy."

"Xaviera—what a queer given name! I have never heard it before."

"My father was Francis Xavier—I am called after him—as near as he could get to it in the feminine, I suppose. It is an odd name."

"It suits you," said Phyllis, gently. "And it is very pretty. But it has such a Catholic sound."

"Oh!" said Xaviera Pomeroy, proudly. "Before everything else I am a Catholic."

Phyllis gazed at her curiously.

"Really? I have never known any Catholics that I can remember. You intend to stay at Segrovia?"

The dark girl shrugged her shoulders.

"I am sent to stay for one year, in banishment. I intend, however, to make that banishment as gay as possible," said Phyllis. "May I count on you to help me?"

"We shall meet, I daresay," said Miss Pomeroy, in an evasive tone.

"Perhaps it would interest you to hear why I am sent away?"

"It certainly would. I am much interested."

"You are kind. My aunt, Mrs. Gordon, brought me up—she is my Uncle Edward's wife. I am poor, poor as a church mouse. I have nothing—and I was educated with my two cousins, Lilian and Sylvia. You know them, perhaps? They are a trifle older

than I—and not quite as pretty.” She smiled maliciously. Xaviera Pomeroy suddenly remembered the Gordon girls—who were decidedly unattractive. And worse. They were more decidedly ill-natured. She felt sorry for Phyllis.

“Aunt Isabel could not take my gifts away from me, nor my pretty face, nor my grace. After a while I found place in ‘society.’”

“And then?”

“Then began my term of misery. I never did anything right, I was too modest, or I was too bold. I talked too much, or I talked too little. When a man wished to marry me I could not make myself wish to marry him. That was my crowning sin. But not even to escape Aunt Isabel’s tyranny could I marry the objects presented for my approval. Ugh!” and the girl shuddered.

Xaviera smiled.

“There was, perhaps, a favored gallant?” she asked.

The least little tinge of pink crept across Phyllis’ round face. “Maybe—but he is like the rest. A maiden may be fair, but

“What care I how fair she be,

If her purse is not lined with gold for me?”

paraphrased the red lips, scornfully. “Things became desperate after a while. That’s why you find me here. Aunt Isabel corresponded with this other aunt, her sister-in-law, after whom I am named—my name is Mary Felicitas. This is the consequence. Banished from all that makes life desirable—for one whole year! Think of that.” The girl’s eyes flashed. “She wears corkscrew curls—I’ve seen her picture. And glasses! And she looks like an old maid! And she hates singing. She detests music. She

can not bear curly hair like mine. Because it's natural, I suppose. And what is worse—"

"What is worse—"

"There is some sort of a wretched practitioner located at Segrovia—first for his health and now for the practice he has built up in that and surrounding towns this last ten years. Think of it. And he's to be mine—Aunt Mary says so. Think of it!"

"But how did you find out all this?"

"Umph! Aunt Isabel was none too careful—and that correspondence beyond all the scruples of politest society—"

Xaviera shook her head disapprovingly.

"You read the letters? What in the world prompted you to come?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Phyllis Gordon, and her lips quivered. "I was tired of Aunt Isabel, tired of the perpetual nagging. It was awful to have to bear with all she had to say to me—to feel that she begrudged me every bit I ate. Uncle Edward was good enough—but he was afraid of Aunt Isabel—poor man."

Xaviera extended one of the beautiful hands that Phyllis had so much admired, and clasped the girl's fluttering fingers. The pressure was warm, strong, encouraging. It was the hand and the handclasp of a woman who could make a wonderful friend.

"You are upset and nervous," she said. "Try to look on the bright side of things. There is something wrong with your education, somewhere."

"Shall I kneel to them? Shall I praise and toady and hem and haw and feign politeness and meekness when I am neither meek nor polite? Look at it yourself with my eyes! Sending

me out here—literally burying me alive! Look at me!” She threw her lovely head in air; excitement had brought the blood to her young cheeks, and her eyes were like gleaming stars. Xaviera caught her breath.

“You are a beautiful, beautiful girl, Miss Phyllis Gordon,” she said. “A very beautiful girl. What are you going to do with that beauty of yours?”

“Marry a rich man,” said Phyllis, promptly.

The answer, if natural, was somewhat disconcerting.

“Oh—I see you are a wise girl, also,” said Xaviera, after a pause. “Very wise as well as very beautiful, Miss Phyllis. Will you listen to me? If you fret against the bond for your year at Segrovia you are going to dim that beauty of yours. You are going to worry little lines under your beautiful big blue eyes, and your pretty mouth is going to droop at the corners. Fine wrinkles will creep about that delicate little nose of yours.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that you should make the best of it. Fill your days with something useful.”

“You mean that I should *work*?”

“Work, if it comes to that. Yes.”

“Oh, but I am a Gordon.”

“Then to be a Gordon means that it is also a necessity to live on the pittance doled out by unwilling relatives?”

Phyllis shivered.

“Work! It lowers one so! I should lose status in society! No one worth while would bother with me then.”

Across Xaviera’s face there crept an expression of contempt.

“Supposing—such things have happened even to girls as beautiful—supposing you never marry?”

"I shall marry," said Phyllis, confidently.

"And what part does love play in the program?"

"Very little, I must confess."

"What a dreadful future!"

"You are too serious—too sentimental."

"Child, you are so young. I wish I could know you for a little while—I would like to try to change these awful ideas."

"Awful? I would not marry a poor man, no matter how much I loved him."

Xaviera looked at her thoughtfully.

"You seek—I shun—society. Yet even to you who run after it, it has not been true."

"I can not live without it."

Xaviera said no more. Unconscious of the concentration of her gaze she stared into the young face. The train slackened speed—the guard, throwing wide the door, called out:

"Segrovia."

Both girls were unprepared for the announcement. They picked up their hats from the space beside them, and Phyllis sprang to lift down Xaviera's bag.

"It is so late," said Phyllis. "It must surely be nine o'clock. Are you expected?"

"No," said Xaviera.

"I am—I suppose I shall have to listen to a lecture because the train was delayed. Will you shake hands with me?"

The girl's delicate hands had fascinated her, their touch seemed to give her a certain strength. Xaviera clasped her fingers closely.

"We shall meet again," she said, gently. "Be a good little girl."

She turned and walked away from her—not because she did not want to see the meeting between Phyllis and the tall, thin woman rapidly approaching them, but because she wanted more than anything else to be alone. Phyllis, waiting, realized with dismay that her picture of Aunt Mary had not been overdrawn. She was very thin, indeed, and her sharp, pinched features gave her an acrid appearance. The incongruity of the two long curls that dangled, one on each side of her face, was not lost on Phyllis.

“Miss Gordon?”

Phyllis bowed—a bow so deep and so full of reverence that it was mockery.

“Stand still,” said Mrs. Browne, commandingly, with the air of a martinet.

The girl obeyed.

“Look at me!”

Phyllis raised those dancing eyes to her face, a smile twitching at the corners of her mouth, despite her efforts to be grave.

“Yes—you are like my brother. Very childish, indeed. You have baggage? Burton, take Miss Gordon’s bag.”

A really smart-looking groom came forward. Phyllis surrendered the bag, wondering if her father had been childish. She did not speak again until they were started on the way home.

“What detained those wretched cars?” asked Aunt Mary. “I shall have an attack of rheumatism from that cold station. I know it. I can feel it in my bones.”

“Rocks on the track,” said Phyllis, briefly. She wondered if she would learn to bite off the ends of her words like that before the year passed. “We were kept back an hour. If the engineer had not been fortunate we would all have been killed.”

"Killed? Umph! They'd say so, anyhow. Always do exaggerate—those fellows. Where was it?"

"I don't know—somewhere around a ravine—"

"Bayard's Gulf, I suppose. Well, that is a dangerous place. Did you see the rocks?"

"No," said Phyllis, wearily.

Both were silent. Not a sound could be heard through the night but the sharp beat of the horses' hoofs upon the snow.

"We are very plain people in Segrovia," said Aunt Mary, at last. "I hope you will be comfortable. It may come hard at first to do without the Edward Gordon luxury."

She spoke with a fine contempt. Phyllis made no answer.

"It is, after all, a healthy existence," continued Aunt Mary. "You may not think so right away—and yet you will find plenty to amuse you—"

"In the country in November?" interposed Phyllis, quickly, with contempt as fine as her own.

"Even in November. All beauty does not vanish with the summer." She gave her a keen glance. "And, barring just a few restrictions, you can do exactly as you please."

"That is good," said Phyllis—and as an afterthought, "Are we nearly to the house? I am tired."

CHAPTER III.

FOR HIS SAKE.

IF Xaviera Pomeroy had seemed calm enough and self-possessed enough to talk of Phyllis Gordon's affairs, it was not because she was really interested in them, but because her mind was in so confused a state that she felt she must occupy it with some trivial matter—and to her, just then, Phyllis Gordon was a very trivial matter indeed! Simply an outlet, a diversion. She was not afraid of the thick darkness of the farther roads—since all about her was the brightness of white snow, and the calm light of the moon. She was glad to be alone. And what were her first words:

“The house on the hill! The house on the hill!” she murmured, brokenly. “I went through the valley of the shadow to take up my cross again. I do not ask Thee to remove it,” she said, raising her face to the brilliant sky. “But take this fear of it away from me, since I would only strive to do Thy will. I am but a weak woman, Lord. Let me not depend upon my strength alone.”

For a long time, pursuing this bitter train of thought, she went on her way, careless of the fact that she knew not where she was going, that she was utterly unacquainted with the way the path led. To her, just then, one direction would have been as good as another, for she had come unheralded and unannounced to people who were, at heart, strangers to her, for all the ties of blood that bound them. Nevertheless, she had re-

solved to seek them—yes, to make her home with them, to learn to love them, and to compel their love, if that were possible. And Xaviera Pomeroy had found few things impossible in all her brave life heretofore.

A sudden shiver passed over her. It seemed to her it was growing colder—surely that breeze tugging at her coat was stronger than when she first started out! She gazed up at the sky apprehensively—a few fine little clouds were drifting across the moon's face—yes, the wind was certainly stronger, and colder and keener. It was so late, also, and to ask questions at this hour! Xaviera was aware with what rapidity news spreads in a little town, and she would seek her aunts as quietly as possible. She passed one or two houses—they were gloomy and colorless; no sign of life visible except the barking of the dogs in the porches and yards. The village proper lay farther on. She looked at her watch. Nine o'clock! Surely that was not so late, even for Segrovia.

A sudden flame seemed to light up the distance in front of her—and she who had complained truly a few moments before that she could not walk even five minutes without some objective point, grasped her bag more firmly, and set out for the steady light. Her uprightness, the swing of the lithe, slim body, showed perfect health and command of muscle. As she approached she saw that the flame came from a blacksmith's shop and that the smith himself was evidently at work, for the sound of heavy, ringing blows was borne to her ears. She would inquire here. As she turned into the path, the wind, which had increased in violence, almost threw her from her feet. She paused to steady herself. A gentleman in riding costume was standing just inside—waiting for the man to finish shoeing his horse, evidently. Xaviera

shrank back almost in affright, her hand clasping her heart. Then she saw that the interested face turned toward her was that of a stranger. The cold look of displeasure that had crept into her eyes when she first discovered Phyllis Gordon was her chief expression now. She turned away quickly. She would not put any questions before this man. He seemed to remind her that the civilization she hated could not be utterly banished from her life.

"I beg your pardon," he said, as he noticed that sudden movement of aversion. He came hurriedly outside the shop. "You wished—"

"Nothing, I thank you," she responded. Then, conscious of her rudeness, "Or—perhaps you could inform me how to reach the main street of the village?"

"Why, yes—at the top of this road there is a little bridge. Cross it, and turn to your right. The road is not so hilly once the bridge is crossed."

He spoke pleasantly, courteously. Xaviera bowed her head and turned out into the path again.

"Shall I go to a hotel—surely Segrovia boasts of a hotel? Or shall I hunt up my aunts at once?" she mused. She did not know that the gentleman was standing where she had left him, staring intently after her. "Do they possess my father's heart—or are they miserable and narrow as are the rest of the world? They may be dead. Dead! But they must have left children. Aunt Winifred was fourteen years younger than Aunt Magdalen—she must be alive, surely. Ah, my brother, what day-dreams ours were! The fortune we meant to accumulate, and the home we meant to make for our people, whom we loved because they were father's sisters. And now! Unknown, un-

sought, unwelcome, unhappy, I come here. How shall I leave it? Ah, my brother, what is my future without you?"

She had reached the little bridge, had crossed it, and turned to the right. She was too perturbed to notice the loneliness of the path she was to take. It was probably a side lane leading into the busier thoroughfare of the town. Only one house, little, low, single-storied, stood set near the edge of the road. Xaviera's brows were drawn together. Once more her mind wandered in one of those painful fits of abstraction that had afflicted her so often of late. A sudden weakness crept into her limbs. Her footsteps faltered. The constriction of her throat seemed to forebode tears. Tears! The very thought frightened her.

"I will not weep," she said, aloud. "I will not weep."

She threw her head back defiantly, her brows curving.

"No, I will not," she said. "I have no time for tears. This is the time to be practical—to forget this absurd heartsickness that weighs me down. I must conquer myself. I have come to Segrovia to conquer myself. And I shall succeed."

The futility of her efforts to find those she sought without inquiry, the impracticability of going further without positive knowledge, struck her with force. She must seek shelter somewhere—anywhere—for the night at least. She must put a stop to these sorrowful thoughts that threatened to engulf her.

And so, straightening her shoulders, with sudden resolution, she knocked sharply at the door of the gloomy cottage. Again and again she rapped. Her efforts were rewarded. She heard slow steps coming along the hall, and then a woman's face peered out at her.

"Who is it?" she asked in a trembling tone. "What do you want?"

"A moment's rest," said Xaviera, "and the answer to a few questions."

At the sound of her voice the woman, who was very old, flung the door wide.

"A stranger—and at this hour!" she exclaimed. "Come in, child. You are ill—your face is pale, your lips are white. Can I help you?"

There was a strange eagerness in her countenance.

"I am poor," she continued. "But my rooms are warm—and there is a chair if you would rest yourself—"

Xaviera could not understand why she looked at her so fixedly. It was the face of a woman who had suffered much—the deep lines on the forehead and around the mouth spoke of that. But the patient resignation, the humility that shone from the faded blue eyes won the girl's heart.

"I would like to accept your invitation—but I am afraid it is so late now that I can not delay very much longer. Tell me, have you lived here any length of time?"

"Almost all my life," said the old woman.

"Ah! You may have heard, then, of the Pomeroy's? Winifred and Magdalen Pomeroy?"

The woman trembled a little. She did not answer immediately, and Xaviera looked at her in anxious suspense.

"Heard? Of the Pomeroy's? Indeed, yes, my child. I know them well."

Xaviera bent forward eagerly.

"Know them? They are alive then still? They are well? They are married?"

"They are not married—they are the dressmakers of the village. Their house is about a half-mile farther on. They live

right across from the main street. But you are surely not going to them at this hour? They will have retired long since."

Xaviera's lips moved silently. The words meant peace to her. Her father's own sisters! Alive! Well! And she was here to stay with them—to love them. . . .

"I thank you," she said, putting out her hand and clasping the old woman's wrinkled fingers. "I thank you, thank you, thank you. They are the ones for whom I am in search—and I knew not where nor whom to ask—"

"You will go to the Pomeroy's?" asked the old lady, in surprise. "You are—a relative, maybe?"

"You may have heard of Francis Pomeroy?" asked Xaviera, gently. This old, old woman, this dear old woman, must have known her father, too. Perhaps remembered him from that time when he had been a child—could tell her of him! Her heart warmed—what a dear, patient, good old woman she seemed!

"And you?" asked the other, breathlessly now. Her face was pallid. "And you, and you—young stranger? Who may you be?"

"His only living child—Xaviera Pomeroy. My brother died one year ago."

A little sigh passed the old woman's lips. She grasped at the framework of the door, and held to it, and her body fell against it.

Xaviera looked at her anxiously.

"I knew it," said the old lady, her white lips barely framing the words. "I knew it, knew it, knew it, when I saw your face. I knew it when you spoke to me. I knew it when you looked at me."

Shaking as with a chill she stood, and Xaviera, putting forth

both strong young arms, held her in an embrace meant to strengthen her failing limbs.

"Your mother!" whispered the woman. "Your mother, my child?"

"I never knew my mother," said Xaviera, tenderly, such pleading was in the poor old face. "She died soon after I was born. It is not possible that you knew my mother, too?"

"I knew your father—well," said the woman, tremblingly. "I knew him and I loved him. Child, if you knew what joy it is to me to feel the arms of Frank Pomeroy's daughter about me. But take them away. Your aunts, if they knew, would not like it—"

"My aunts!" said the girl. "Tell me about them. Oh, I do not trust strangers—for strangers have used me cruelly, cruelly. But I trust you. Tell me of my aunts."

"Let me tell you of your father, rather," said the old woman, wistfully. "And after him of Magdalen Pomeroy, and Winifred. Look—my house is humble, poor, straitened—but it is overlate for you to seek shelter elsewhere to-night. I have not had much happiness these last years of my life—will you believe me when I tell you that it will make me very happy to have you spend one night under my roof? Will you gladden my heart just for this one night?—gladden it because Frank's child would not disdain its shelter?"

And then Xaviera Pomeroy did a most strange thing. She bent her stately head and kissed the old woman on the lips.

"I shall stay—and thank you for permitting me to," she said. "For I can tell by your very voice that you loved him—and I know that you will love me for his sake."

CHAPTER IV.

HIS SISTER MAGDALEN.

THEY talked far into the night. The old lady, whose name was Thornton, told Xaviera many tales of that distant past with which her father was connected. She did not seem to know much of his marriage—she could tell her very little on this subject, and she was constrained and silent when the girl spoke of Magdalen Pomeroy. When morning came, and it was time for her to set out for the cottage, Mrs. Thornton could scarcely bear to part with her.

“You will return? Promise me you will return?” she said. “You will not find it hard now to reach them.” She gave her explicit directions—and then added with that strange thrill in her voice, “I can not bear to let you go. You will come back again—you will not leave without seeing me if it is only just once more?”

“I am not going away from Segrovia,” said the girl. “I shall stay here now that I have come.”

“God grant it,” said Mrs. Thornton. The tears that had been welling to her eyes fell upon her clasped fingers as she watched the girl—who stood when she reached the top of the road to wave her hand back at her in farewell. “She looks so good, so honest—it seems as if she really knew what her life purpose was to be. Frank, Frank, how is it that your child comes from the great world like a bird thrown from its nest—here, the place you disliked above all others? Did you, too, discover that the world was but a delusion and a snare after you found your

way outside? Do you know that she is here? And she has come—for what? To make atonement? God grant it, Frank, God grant it!”

Xaviera, meanwhile, soon found herself standing before the two-storied white house Mrs. Thornton had described to her. She had not left very early, for she had wished to give her aunts a chance to start the day before she surprised them. A few moments she waited, looking at the sign on the door—a black sign, with an inscription in white letters:

THE MISSES POMEROY. DRESSMAKERS.

A smile curved the girl's lips. She had come to Segrovia to “learn to work.” The bodily weariness of the night before had left her—even the great and bewildering shock occasioned by whatever vision she had seen in the “house on the hill” had worn away. With the cold, clear sunlight of a new day enveloping her, she felt strong for any fate. She could dare the future more courageously. And she was glad now that she had not come to them as she had been last night—heart-sick and foot-sore and despondent.

So Xaviera stood, staring at the sign. She was to cast her lot with the village dressmakers. Not a misgiving crossed that great mind of hers as to her ability to make her lot a peaceful, contented one.

“Nay—of all the crumbs that fall from Thy table, Lord,” she breathed. “Give me content. Possessing that, I am rich, indeed—and Lord, Thou knowest how long I have lacked it, and lacking it, despite the riches the world gave me, how poor, how poor, how poor!”

Her eyes fell suddenly on the lowest of the immaculately white steps that led up to the door. Then she knew that she had been looking, without seeing him, at a little boy—a little child surely not more than five years old. He was poorly dressed and his feet were encased in broken shoes away too large for him. He was blowing lustily on his little hands, which were blue with the cold.

“You will get sick if you stay out here,” said Xaviera, gently. “Why don’t you go inside, you foolish little fellow?”

He looked at her shyly with his gray eyes—so shyly that Xaviera barely refrained from picking him up in her arms and carrying him in with her whether he would or no. The door opened just then, and a girl came out—as poorly clad as the boy, with a thin, peaked face, and unkempt hair adding to the elfish look induced by cold and hunger. She had a paper parcel which she held very carefully, and she came down the steps, lowering her eyes when she met Xaviera’s curious glance. The little boy grabbed at her skirt as she approached him.

“Why don’t you send him inside?” asked Xaviera then. “It is too cold for either one of you to be out. Your clothes are very poor for such a bleak day as this.”

“Danny can’t come in,” said the girl, shrinking. “Miss Winnie scolds me, sometimes, if she sees him—but Danny always follows me. I tell him and tell him to stay at home—but he just won’t.”

“And where— isn’t this your home?” asked Xaviera.

The girl’s eyes opened very wide.

“This? Oh, no, ma’am. This is Miss Pomeroy’s. I only run errands sometimes for Miss Pomeroy. And Danny follows me.”

"Haven't you a mother?" asked Xaviera, her heart aching as she noted the poverty-stricken appearance of the two children.

"No, ma'am." Then she added, quickly. "Danny has me, though."

"Do you know how to buy things for Danny?" asked Xaviera. "If I give you some money to buy thick stockings for you and Danny, and— Let me see your feet. Yes, I guess you need a new pair of shoes, too. And after that take what is left and get something to eat, and don't go out again to-day. And if you come to see me soon I shall go with you to your house and see what I can do for you."

What better way than to start her new life with an act of charity? Xaviera's heart, touched as it was, grew tender when she saw the look of delight that flashed across the child's face.

"If they ask you who gave you the money, or question you," said Xaviera, "tell them to come to Miss Pomeroy."

The girl's eyes were sparkling—she looked at the money in the extended hand, incredulously. Then she gazed once more into Xaviera's face. Seeing that it was really intended for her she grasped it hurriedly.

"Oh!" she said. "Thank you—you are good. You are so good. You are—"

"Never mind," said Xaviera. "Come to see me to-morrow, and then you can tell me who you are, dear. But first, what is your name?"

"Elizabeth Bernard."

"Good-by, Elizabeth."

She knocked at the door two or three times. Receiving no answer she turned the knob, and found herself in a narrow hall. Not knowing what else to do, Xaviera entered. A door at the

right evidently led into another room, and there was a closed door at the end of the hall. She hardly knew which one to try first—but noticing that the one nearest her was slightly ajar, she knocked gently and went in. A little woman, rather stout, and with a round, pleasant, somewhat weak face, was bending over a machine, sewing on some black stuff. Seeing Xaviera, she immediately ceased her work, and rose to her feet.

“You will pardon me for entering in this way,” said Xaviera, in her sweet voice. All the coldness of her exterior had disappeared as if by magic. She forgot all, everything, save that here were her father’s sisters, who were to love her, and whom she was to love. “I knocked at the outside door several times—but I received no answer.”

“It is always open,” said the little woman. Xaviera, standing, saw that she herself was head and shoulders over her. “Every one about here knows that, so they just walk in. My sister and I are always so busy—we have no time to keep the latch on. But perhaps I can serve you?” She glanced at the quiet elegance of the slender figure. “You wish—”

“You are—Miss Pomeroy?” asked Xaviera—and there was a curious tremble in her voice. “Miss—Winifred?”

“Yes,” said the little woman.

“I am Xaviera Pomeroy—your brother Frank’s only daughter.”

There was dead silence. The woman seemed suddenly frozen. She clutched at the machine, and after that stood staring, her face growing white. Fear struck at Xaviera’s heart. Why was it people looked at her so strangely? What effect had her name on these simple folk that it created fear rather than astonishment—and never welcome?

"You are my Aunt Winifred?" she said, gently. "Surely you know of me?"

"Xaviera Pomeroy—yes, I know of you," said the little woman, tremulously. She glanced nervously toward the inner room. "Won't you—sit down?"

But Xaviera did not hear her.

"I came to find you," she said in a low voice. "Frank is dead—he died a year ago. And my father— You knew that— I am alone."

"And why— What brought you to Segrovia?"

"I did not expect to find you living—I wanted to see his home—"

"What is it?" called a sharp voice from the inner room. "Who is out there, Winifred?"

"Come, and see, Magdalen," was the answer, in a strange tone. "Come, and see."

Xaviera turned an expectant face toward the door, in which at that moment the tall figure of a woman appeared—as tall a woman as was Xaviera herself. They stood, gazing one at the other. From the mass of gray-black hair to the dark eyes, in which strange lights burned, the set lips, the whole carriage of the body—all, every bit of her, was Xaviera Pomeroy. And the woman looked upon the girl as she might upon her lost youth. Incredulity, anger, passion—who could read the complexity of emotions that succeeded one another over her clearly-chiseled features? It was a noble old age—straight and undimmed and masterful for all the years. Time had not conquered the proud head, or touched to stooping the squarely-set shoulders. Xaviera had not expected her Aunt Magdalen to look like this. As for the older woman, she advanced very slowly toward the girl until she

stood close to her. Their eyes were on a level—only that Xaviera's were young eyes and nobler eyes. No fire of resentment stirred their depths. No years of animosity had made the lines about them cruel. No unforgiving spirit looked from behind the long black lashes. And in Magdalen Pomeroy's were all these: animosity, cruelty, unforgiveness. But Xaviera held her own.

"Frank!" whispered the woman. "Frank!"

That was all. Suddenly then, the fierce light left her face, and she began to sob in a dry, tearless fashion that was awful to hear. Much frightened, Winifred Pomeroy went to her sister, and put her arms about her.

"It would have been better had you prepared us," she said. "It is not well to do such a thing as this—we are both old and can not stand very much. Why did you not write?"

"I could not," said Xaviera, sick at heart at this strange reception. "I could not. I did not know whether you were dead or living. My brother wrote you—"

"Your brother! An actor—as your father was—as you are! Why should we answer his letter? Who was he, or what was he to us—" It was Aunt Magdalen who spoke. "What have we simple, honest folk to do with the like of you and yours?"

A deeper crimson suffused the girl's pale face.

"You have brought your mother with you, perhaps?" went on Aunt Magdalen, shaking as with an ague with very passion. "She, too, is smitten with overwhelming desire to see the home of her husband?"

"My mother?" asked Xaviera. This was too much—her lips trembled. "My mother is dead. I have never seen my mother."

"Ah!" interposed Aunt Winifred. "You have never seen

your mother?" And then she added, in a different tone: "When do you go back to Italy?"

"Never. I intend to remain here."

"Never? You—"

"Not in this house—no. My reception scarcely warrants that." She went to the door. "I shall remain in Segrovia, nevertheless. I have seen my father's sisters. My—father's—sisters!" She turned to look at them—both of them—and the disdain in her glance made the younger woman wince. "Pardon me if I say that I can scarcely believe it."

"Wait, wait," said Winifred, hastily. "Magdalen, after all—Magdalen, she is going away. You won't let her go away, Magdalen."

"Stay!" said Magdalen Pomeroy, in a harsh voice. "Stay, I command you!"

Xaviera paused. The disdain of her pale face gave way to an expression of amusement. She to be commanded—she, who had had the world at her feet. But the thought of that world, and of what she had suffered in it—the thought of that resolution which she had made to put the world behind her by the very strength of that powerful will of hers came back upon her, driving all disdain and sarcasm from her. She turned from the door and came back into the room again, holding out both her hands.

"Oh, I do not know what I have done that you should treat me so harshly," she said, piteously. "I came to you because I wanted to creep away from outsiders, because I am sick of people who flatter, who praise, and who malign. Because I want to live a simple, honest, true life—just here with you. Because my father loved you, and I, too, want to love you. Try me. See of what stuff I am made before you send me away from you."

Winifred Pomeroy could not resist her. She met her half-way, and put her arms about her tightly.

"Poor child, poor child!" she said, weeping. "No, we shall not send you away from us, dear. Magdalen, tell her that she can stay."

But the older woman, grown white and weak, did not utter a word.

"For Frank's sake," began Winifred.

"For Frank's sake!" Magdalen Pomeroy turned on them in sudden rage. "What did I not sacrifice for Frank's sake? Do you, who are his daughter, know how much? What did I not give up for him? Home, husband, children, happiness—everything that makes life worth living to a woman I gave up that I might devote myself to Frank. I gave him all my care, all my service. I gave him love—the love of my whole heart. For Frank's sake! You do well to plead in the name of one who so carried out my wishes! How did he repay me? A foolish woman's prettiness had but to dawn on his perverted mind—a pretty woman's smile had but to dance its way into his heart—and I was only Magdalen! He forgot me! He thwarted all my hopes for him, and all my plans for him, and left me to my loneliness. No, no, no. Whatever I may do or say will be for her sake—not for his. There is no room in my heart for one memory of the boy who proved traitor to my love—not one."

Xaviera did not quail under the dreadful torrent of words which were hissed at her from between half-shut teeth.

"And yet, what my father said of you, Aunt Magdalen, prompted me to return," she began, steadily. "He drew me the picture of such a woman—such a noble and good and tender woman!—who had been his mother, father, comrade, playfellow.

Who had watched him and tended him, and spent long nights of sleeplessness because of him. And he told me of her great love—and how he had realized his love for her—too late. He had no inclination to be the priest you would have made him, and he said he could not make you understand. You would not feel that the highest vocation in life does not come to a man because his people wish it. Your influence was so strong that he feared he might be tempted to accede, in the end. He dared not risk it. He met my mother and he loved her. He never spoke of her to us without the tenderest affection—so that we, too, loved her tenderly.

“How he longed to see his home—his little home just once before he died! And his sister Magdalen! He bade me bring her his message asking her forgiveness. He said—”

They were listening, both of them, with parted lips and eager eyes, for the girl’s ringing tones had carried them away. Magdalen Pomeroy’s wrinkled hands were clutching at her heaving bosom.

“He said—” she breathed. “Go on.”

“He said that God knew he had tried to do his duty, and that surely God would grant him only one thing—the knowledge, in that other world, of his sister Magdalen’s forgiveness. He knew that the moment she forgave him from her heart that he would know it. He bade me—both of us, but only I am left—he bade us tell you of the years you loved him and cared for him, and of his love for you. He bade me tell you that never; never had he forgotten—”

“No more, girl,” said Magdalen Pomeroy, in a tense voice. “No more. I can not bear it.”

She turned to leave the room. When she reached the inner door she paused, her strong face working.

“Stay,” she said. “Stay. Because you are Frank’s daughter, stay with us.”

“Afterward,” said Winifred, weeping. “She will bid you stay because she loves you. I know my sister Magdalen.”

CHAPTER V.

THE FLOWER OF RESIGNATION.

"MAY I see Miss Pomeroy?"

There had been a great deal of talk in the small town concerning the Honorable Mrs. Browne's beautiful niece. Rumors regarding her angelic loveliness, her charming manners, her exquisite voice, and also of the great riches which she was supposed to possess in her own right had reached even Xaviera's ears. But the latter had been so busy adjusting herself to new conditions this past six weeks that she had scarcely a moment to think of the girl whom she had met upon the train that eventful day. Now she looked up at the vision in the doorway, smiling at her in friendly fashion.

"Good heavens!" said Phyllis, in a voice almost of horror. For Xaviera was standing before an ironing-board, industriously pressing at the seams of a waist she held spread out before her. Phyllis, staring, could not believe her eyes.

"What are you doing?" she went on, still in that horrified voice. "No—you working? You? Good heavens!" she repeated. "You meant it, then?"

Xaviera smiled.

"Miss Gordon, is it not?" Phyllis felt rebuked at her own assumption of more than mere acquaintanceship—evidently Xaviera Pomeroy meant to keep her at a distance. "I was not sure that I remembered the name correctly—but at least I can not forget that your given name is Phyllis." And she looked at her

kindly. "You are welcome. This is my Aunt Winifred. Aunt Winifred, please permit me—Miss Gordon."

Little Aunt Winifred bowed—quite overcome, not alone by the stranger's wonderful beauty, but by the sudden graciousness, the tenderness, the very pride in Xaviera's voice when she spoke her name. Phyllis realized this also, and looked with keener interest at the plain, pleasant little woman, wondering if she were really the aunt of this tall and queenly girl—and wondering also if there were more to her than appeared on the surface. Aunt Winifred merely bowed and bent her head again over her machine for a few seconds. Then rising she made some excuse and left the room.

"I have thrown myself into the workaday life, you see," said Xaviera, holding up the garment on which she had been laboring. "I have always been able to do fine needlework—that was a natural taste. Now I am putting my natural taste to some practical use—and am delighted at my success. Really delighted."

"Oh, no," began Phyllis, pleadingly. "I can not believe my own eyes or ears! It is impossible! You are a veritable princess! And you turn yourself into a dressmaker! I can not understand. You mean to stay at this sort of work?"

"I mean to stay at this sort of work."

"I congratulate you. Your will *must* be of iron. As for me—"

"You are pleased with Segrovia, I have heard. Every one is talking of you."

"Every one—in Segrovia. A pin bubble on the sea! Yes, I am pleased with Segrovia. So exceedingly well pleased that my trunks are packed."

"No, no," said Xaviera, in great astonishment. "Where are

you going? Back to New York? And after all your resolutions—”

“Would to heaven you could grasp my position,” said Phyllis, despairingly. “Yours—yes, even your humble one—is paradise compared to it.”

Xaviera’s look questioned her, challenged her.

“You are older than I,” said Phyllis, impetuously, stung by that meaning glance. “You have had a different training. What you call independence I consider a lowering in the social scale.” Her words were very warm, and her eyes sparkling.

“We will not discuss our relative positions,” said Xaviera, haughtily.

“There—I have made you angry! But if you understood! Even you can not escape the tongues of those who do not know you. It is whispered that you are other than you seem. They wonder where you came from, what your history has been. They dare to wonder if you have not committed some crime or other that you thus leave the world and bury yourself alive. They wonder—”

“Hush, hush!” said Xaviera, very white. “What they surmise is of no interest to me. Naturally, people are anxious to learn what sort of character she may be who desires to live among them. It is but right that they should question—I do not blame them. Why do you mention such a thing?”

“Because from it I can judge what they are saying of Phyllis Gordon,” cried the girl, hotly. “Miserable beings! If they can’t let *you* alone, *what* will they say of me?”

Xaviera pushed her hair back, wearily.

“And still I am not interested,” she said. “In a few years they will look upon me as a fixture—even as an ornament to the

town, if I succeed in being as good a dressmaker as either of my aunts," and she smiled. "They will know that I am different. And you— In a few years you will have forgotten the name Segrovia. Of what use?"

"Of what use, indeed!" echoed Phyllis. "It was such great fun the first few days. Everybody in the town was at his window waiting for me to pass so that he could get a glimpse of me. Now no one on the street takes the trouble to turn his head to look at me! I *know* I am getting ugly in this dreadful little place. Such a thing could not happen else."

Xaviera looked at her almost in consternation. Sorely tempted to laugh, second thoughts drove away all suspicion of amusement. Phyllis had seen that gravity before; Xaviera put her hands upon the girl's shoulders and looked into the upturned, beautiful face.

"What a wrong they have done you, lovely Phyllis Gordon," she said, her deep voice thrilling. "What a bitter, miserable, cruel, irremediable wrong they have done you to let your soul lie dormant, to keep the sweetness that this heart of yours should know from blessing all your young life. And this is what the world has done for you. And you love it! Poor, little, foolish Phyllis! Poor little thoughtless moth!"

A ray of winter sunlight stealing through the window glass had touched the girl's dark head, and fallen across her eyes—her beautiful, tender, grave eyes, bringing out the wonderful hidden light in them. Phyllis gazed at her in rapture. The words, the tone had touched something in her bosom—even as it had been touched six weeks before. She scarcely grasped the meaning. She knew one thing perfectly, however—that could she but enter into the heart of the girl standing above her and understand her, she would find perfect peace.

"You should be one of the great ones of the earth, so that people looking up to you could grow better," she said, in a low voice.

"You will go home if you talk to me like that," said Xaviera, her hands dropping to her sides.

"Ah, let me," said Phyllis. "Mine is not flattery—it is honest truth. I have no envy of you. No feeling other than that of perfect joy when I look at you. Honest, pure joy. Let me have it while I may, for it is a rare thing to me. I am older than you," she went on, musingly. "I do actually believe that I am older than you. You are excited at the first sound of praise—while I crave it, long for it, live for it. And they think to keep me hidden from the great place where all my life lies—where alone I can be happy!"

"What did I tell you when I first saw you? Why do you not try to content yourself? Especially since—since my way is not acceptable to you."

"Your way?" Phyllis brought up her shoulders gracefully. "No, no. I am too proud for that."

Xaviera said nothing. She knew how useless any words would be against such deeply-rooted false pride as Phyllis Gordon's.

"If I could play as well as I know you must," said Phyllis, easily. "And if I had your presence—will you teach me to turn my head the way you do, or to lift my eyes in that steady, determined fashion? If I could do that I would conquer the world, and marry a duke!"

Xaviera laughed—a little, soft ripple of amusement.

"The price is too high," she said. "The giving of one's self—and at best the title is but an empty one. You would find it so."

"You have met dukes and earls and all that sort in your traveling around the world, haven't you?" went on Phyllis, eagerly. "I should love to meet a real one—a genuine one, I mean. What are they like?"

"Nothing out of the ordinary," said Xaviera. "Some of them are gentlemen."

"Is that surprising?"

"That is—surprising. Gentlemen are scarce."

"Now you are sarcastic. When—when you met them," Phyllis stole a glance at her from under her lashes, "were you sarcastic?"

"I don't know," said Xaviera, wearily. "Not unless they said things that were not true. I do not like even white untruths. I can not bear a man or woman who tells me lies."

"There are worse things than white untruths," said Phyllis, thoughtfully. "And you—even you, Xaviera Pomeroy—are committing one of them."

"I?"

"You. You are untrue to yourself. Can one hide one's gift, can one bury it, put it out of sight without a pang?" She spoke tauntingly now. "What is it they say about buried talents? What will you do when the ghost of your lost art rises up to mock you? Not now—but later? Too late?"

Again Xaviera stared at her. Where did the young lips find the words? How did the frivolous young brain form the thoughts? There must be something—surely there must be something worth while underneath. She felt driven to self-defense.

"When—when my brother died," said Xaviera, "the best string of my instrument snapped. I had no more desire—and when my fingers touched the chords they could only bring forth

in them the heartbreak of a spoiled, unhappy life. No, no, child. The soul of music is dead within me."

There was silence for a little while. Then Phyllis touched the slim hands she loved and held them.

"You overwhelm me," she said. "I long to be near you, I long to hear you speak. But you frighten me. There is something accusing about you—something that seems to set a nerve within me throbbing. Something that hurts me—and when I feel so I want to get away from you, even though I know I shall have no peace until I come again. Why, ever since that day, in the train I have thought of nothing but you—and of the queer things that happened—"

She closed her lips, afraid of the question that might come to them. With sudden eagerness, Xaviera bent forward.

"The house on the hill!" she said. "I have thought of that, too. Often. Listen to me. I had much trouble—very much trouble. And one man more than any other gave me infinite pain. It was to avoid him I came to Segrovia. Now, under no possible earthly conditions that I can imagine could that man discover where I was or reach that house on the hill. So I have made up my mind that what I saw was a vision—a chimerical fancy. And I meant to ask you about it the very first time I saw you. You, too, saw that sleeping man through the curtain on that night, did you not?"

"Yes," said Phyllis.

"He was fair, with a heavy blonde mustache, a high forehead, with hair that fell over his temples; a square chin, regular features—aristocratic, handsome—"

"No," said Phyllis, slowly. "He did not look like that. He was dark. His hair was black."

Xaviera's breath came hard. She clenched her hands together.

"Oh, thank God," she breathed. "Thank God! It was my imagination—" She bent forward to look into Phyllis' eyes. "Black hair, dark— Look at me? Oh!"

For Phyllis had raised her innocent blue eyes, and Xaviera read the truth in them. She was silent.

"I did not imagine it, then," said Xaviera, wearily. "It is true. Phyllis, why did you lie to me?"

Phyllis buried her face on the other's shoulder.

"Is it—so bad if one tries to make another happy?" she whispered.

"Doubly bad—the awakening is so much harder," said Xaviera. "Never do it again, Phyllis." And then in an undertone, "How could he have gotten there; how could he have gotten to the house on the hill?"

At that moment Phyllis felt as if she were in truth the elder, as she put her arms about the girl to whom she was so strangely drawn.

"You are in trouble," she said, gently. "I know I am foolish and silly, and one that you scarcely can like to talk to or exchange confidences with. I wish you would let me help you, Xaviera, for I love you. And that is the honest truth."

Greatly touched, Xaviera caressed the fair head.

"You are the first of my sex who ever told me that," she said, "and I shall remember it and try to care for you, too little Phyllis."

* * * * *

"I want to talk to you about Aunt Mary," said Phyllis. She was ready to go home, and they stood together at the door. "You

see, I forgot everything else but you when I came here. We've had a quarrel."

"Oh, yes—you said your trunks were packed," said Xaviera, in an interested voice.

"I'm afraid I'll have to do something desperate. Do you know she came into the world three centuries too late, Xaviera Pomeroy? It's a *crime* for a girl to walk about the street without a chaperon! Do you think you could spare me a half-hour now—to walk with me toward the house so that in case she sees me— I ran away, Xaviera."

"Ran away?"

"Yes. Waited until her back was turned—then took my coat and hat and didn't put them on until I got out into the road. Isn't that awful? Imagine such restrictions—after the life I've known! But the worst is still to come. Put on your things and walk a little way with me. Or are you too busy?"

"Not just now. If I had been busy I should not have let you stay so long," said Xaviera, smiling. "I'll tell Aunt Winifred, and be ready in a second."

Phyllis did not say any more until they were out on the narrow paved street—then in an impressive voice she began her tale.

"Aunt Mary locks my door at night—and takes the key away with her," she said. "I shall never forget my sensations the first time I discovered it. I cried, then I laughed—and this last few nights I felt that I shall go stark, staring mad if she keeps it up. What would happen to me if a fire broke out—and I'm so afraid of fire. I have a perfect horror of it."

"That is too bad," said Xaviera. "Doesn't she give you any reason? Try to explain—"

"Try to explain? Come up as far as my Aunt Mary's and see if you think you could explain anything to her."

"I would not like to do that. She might resent a stranger's interference."

"No. She will forgive me anything, because I satisfy her curiosity. She is dying to see Magdalen Pomeroy's niece. That wasn't your Aunt Magdalen I saw?"

"No—Winifred. Aunt Magdalen is much—"

"She is very despotic—and tyrannical— Oh, I beg your pardon." Phyllis blushed. "You see how gossip will out. I have been pitying you."

"Aunt Magdalen has had much trouble," said Xaviera. "It is scarcely fair to judge her by the standards of other people."

"Especially by Segrovian standards. No—I should have liked her because the others do not."

"Yes," said Xaviera, "since you do everything by contraries."

"You have taught me a great deal this morning. If Aunt Mary is half-way decent, I may— Well, out of those things we most despise something can arise to smooth away our discontent—even as a flower may spring from the most downtrodden earth."

And again Xaviera looked at her strangely.

"Perhaps the flower of resignation?"

"I can not give it a name," said Phyllis. "I can not give it a name."

CHAPTER VI.

THE APPARITION.

"MISS PHYLLIS, Miss Phyllis! Oh! Mrs. Browne is so frightened! She has had us hunting for you everywhere! We had to leave our work, and your aunt herself has gone out to look for you. She was afraid something might have happened—that you were lost—and she has taken the mountain road up to the forest—"

"Where, I suppose, she thinks I have hanged myself!"

Fanny drew back, nonplussed at the harshness of the girl's voice.

"Come, come," said Phyllis, impatiently. "Now that I am neither lost, strayed, nor stolen, go back to your interrupted household tasks. Send some one after my respectable aunt too, if you please, and inform her that I am still alive. Will you follow me, Miss Pomeroy?"

The girl had been thrown into a towering rage by the servant's well-meant words. The self-restrained Xaviera looked annoyed at this outburst, but she said nothing. The softened mood of a half-hour ago had vanished. She was to learn a new phase of this undisciplined nature. Heretofore, she had seen her at her best, and had pitied her. Now she was to have a glimpse of her character in ordinary attire.

"There are no carpets in this wonderful villa—they are germ-gatherers," said Phyllis, mockingly. "We have no unnecessary luxury."

And yet the house was charming. It was bright, peaceful, comfortable, and the carpetless stairs fairly shone. The room into which Phyllis conducted her visitor was simple indeed; but cleanliness made it look like a jewel-case. From the one big window there was the view of the mountains—near and distant, blue and gray and golden; a little frozen brook down in the valley; the sky rendered clearer by the frosty air, and stretching far and away to meet the glorious, sun-kissed, shining mountain-tops. Xaviera's first glance was for the window. She caught her breath.

"It is beautiful," she said. "Oh, Phyllis, how very beautiful!"

"In comparison to that hole you occupy?" said Phyllis, cuttingly. "All goes by comparison—everything. I can't bear it."

"You can't bear what?"

"All this—the room, the bareness, the cold. The mountains and sky and valley. Xaviera, I shall go mad."

"If you harp on that string, I perforce must harp on mine," said Xaviera, a shade of contempt creeping into her voice. "There is one great thing necessary in this world. You must work. Not for a living, as I do—but you must occupy your idle hands with something. Heretofore I have not told you of even a greater lack, because I do not know what attitude you condescend to hold toward your Creator. But surely you believe in Him? And what was good enough for Him should be good enough for you! He was not ashamed to work—and He has made work the penalty of our existence here and hereafter— Oh, I know! I can read your expression. You think I am preaching. I am telling you of that which is as needful to your daily happiness as the food that sustains life."

"Oh, you are a Catholic," said Phyllis, almost in contempt.

"I am—thank God," said Xaviera.

"What shall I win by it? Show me what I shall win by it—and let the prize be ever so small, I shall strive. Show me."

Xaviera turned to the window again.

"I am finding the fruits of it daily."

Phyllis grasped her arm, her eyes flashing.

"What have you won? Tell me, what have you won?"

"Peace," said Xaviera. "Satisfaction, ease of conscience, content."

"Peace—satisfaction—content! How can you say such words to me, you who are a lover of truth? What peace or satisfaction or content can you know—when you remember—the house on the hill?"

It was a daring question—it was a cruel question—this question of Phyllis Gordon's unthinking little soul. The force of it drove every drop of blood from Xaviera's face. For it was a question she had striven not to ask herself. Yet her steady eyes did not falter.

"My God has come to me," she said. "What pain is mine is through no fault of mine. And in the still watches of the night I know that God's great love enfolds me—and that the way leads beyond to peace, to satisfaction, to content."

"I am not Xaviera Pomeroy," said Phyllis, in that cold, shrill voice of hers. "I am not the girl whose performances on the harp three years ago set Europe by the ears! Yes, I know you—I have asked of those who did know you, and I have questioned. Is yours such a common name that people can not find trace of you? Why may not we exchange personalities, since you will not use and do not need the grace the God you speak of has given you—your

talents, your magnetism? People hate me. Even you dislike me now—yes, your dislike is near to hatred just at this moment. I possess nothing but my face—I am mean and I am malicious, and I am untruthful. I have nothing. You despise me. There is room for nothing but ambition in my soul. I am not independent, and yet wish to impress upon people that I am. I am proud—yet I crawl before you—”

“I can not listen,” said Xaviera. “I am going home. I can not listen.”

“I believed in love, and in God,” cried Phyllis, her hand pressed to her heaving bosom. “But they took my belief away from me. They said that God was a fable—that there was but the one god, and his name is Mammon. Then I believed in love—I would make love my god. I found out, too, that it was the dream they called it. I believe in nothing. I am nothing. I will be nothing. Disprove it to me.”

At that moment a great desire to win this rebellious creature came over Xaviera Pomeroy. She saw, with those last words, that some hidden bitterness stirred in Phyllis Gordon’s mind—that she had suffered and was suffering. She wished to draw out the knife from the wound wherein it rankled.

“What are you but nothing?” she said, gravely. She turned her head. There was one way to conquer Phyllis, and that was by contempt. To a great degree, heretofore, she had kept the contempt from her face—but now she gave it full play. “I can not prove you otherwise by the things of the flesh you crave, nor by the false world that has taught you the canting speech you frame. Yet will you dare to trust yourself to me? One by one I shall show you what things you lack, and what things you should strive for—”

"Phyllis! You are here!"

The thin, precise old lady whom Xaviera remembered having seen once before on the station entered the room without ceremony, interrupting the girl's intense words.

"Where were you?" went on the aunt, her face very stern, her manner peremptory.

"I called on Miss Pomeroy," said Phyllis. "And then persuaded her to return with me. Allow me to introduce you to my aunt, Mrs. Browne, Miss Pomeroy."

Her tones were cold, her manner that of one performing a painful duty. Aunt Mary's eyes sought Xaviera's face scrutinizingly, curiously. That gaze was the gaze of the world about her. Xaviera felt this, and bore it with the steadiness of one who has learned perfect self-control.

"If Miss Pomeroy's influence over you is such as to make you set at naught the express wishes of your guardians," said Aunt Mary, haughtily, "it would be better for it to be removed at once."

Not a muscle stirred—not an eyelash wavered. The Honorable Mrs. Browne was not capable of rousing resentment.

"I asked her to come here with me to convince herself that what I told her was true—that I can stay in this wretched house no longer!" said Phyllis.

"Stay—here—no—longer!" Aunt Mary gasped. "How dare you?"

"I dare anything."

"And where, may I ask, do you intend to go?"

"Back to New York."

Mrs. Browne sniffed.

"Even if the roads were passable—and they have never been since that fall of snow on Christmas day, two weeks ago—you

could not reach the Gordons. They will not have you. Your pardon, Miss Pomeroy, for airing family troubles—but I daresay they are not new to you. My niece seems to have little sense of discretion.”

“Ah!” said Phyllis.

“If you absolutely refuse to remain, of course I shall not detain you against your will. But you are under age, and by consent of your guardian—who is your Uncle Edward, you will remember—you shall be placed in an institution for the next year and a half.”

Phyllis was speechless. The old lady, feeling that she had spoken too harshly, continued, in a milder tone:

“I want to do what is right—but you frustrate me at every turn. You know what my position in Segrovia is, and how anxious I am to maintain it. A nice scandal it would create when folks discovered that the Honorable Mrs. Browne’s niece stole away in the night—”

“Is that why you locked the door?” asked Phyllis, suddenly. “Why, if I *wanted* to get away would the locking of a door stop me?”

“People would not handle you any too carefully if such a story went the rounds,” said Aunt Mary, evasively. “If I were you, I would think of that. A year is not such a long while—”

She had touched the girl’s self-love—nevertheless her heart was sore and wounded. She raised her eyes from the floor to where Xaviera stood, silent and immovable.

“Advise me,” she said. “Advise me, Xaviera.”

“Stay,” said Xaviera, quickly. “Your aunt speaks the truth. Perhaps she will omit making you a prisoner hereafter if you put the case before her in its right light.”

"Dr. Fawcett is downstairs, madam," said Fanny, thrusting in her head.

Aunt Mary breathed more freely.

"Fanny will unpack your trunks. I shall expect you in the drawing-room in ten minutes. Good-by, Miss Pomeroy."

She bowed her head condescendingly, and left the room.

"Old dragon!" muttered Phyllis.

"You will not talk like that while with me," said Xaviera, warningly.

"Now, Xaviera, you're human and you know you're angry. She said—"

"Never mind what she said. *She* was angry, not I. She will think better of me in a little while. But it all depends upon you."

"Upon me?"

"Yes. She mentioned my influence over you." Xaviera hesitated—then, as if by a great effort went over to Phyllis and clasped her in her arms, kissing her. "Let me see what that influence can do with you—if it can make you the true and noble woman you should be, Phyllis."

But Phyllis was the child again, staring at her with the rapt expression she had worn in the little parlor of the Pomeroy house.

"On one condition—that I go to you every day."

"You forget—I have work to do."

"I will be quiet—I shall just run in to look at you—and then out again. Now if Aunt Mary had asked you down to the drawing-room—" she frowned.

"No—I am a stranger to her—only the niece of the dress-makers—learning the trade myself. Be reasonable, Phyllis; you must not expect too much. Good-by until to-morrow."

Fanny came, and following her, Xaviera made her way out

through one of the side doors, quickly finding herself on the road toward home. She was thinking deeply—for the first time in many months she was interested in human beings. It was a sign that she was recovering her mental poise. Strangely enough, she felt happy, too. Every day she got up she thanked God that He had brought her to this refuge—this haven. And now others were coming to her for help and guidance. She was glad to find the old desire to aid them striving within her. It showed that the human side of her was not the dead thing she had supposed it to be.

“Poor little creature,” she said. She was thinking of Phyllis. “Perhaps she is braver than I in saying she loves the world. It has treated and is treating—”

Two gentlemen were approaching her—both dressed in sporting costume, and with guns and gamebags slung across their shoulders. Both were staring at the girl long before she saw them. She raised her eyes, conscious of their presence. One was a stranger; the other—

A sudden pallor covered her face. Her footsteps slackened, her heart began to beat madly. Ah, no! It was a phantom, a resemblance, merely! God would not let it happen! That he should come to Segrovia!

Aunt Winifred was at home alone. Magdalen Pomeroy had gone into the town with some finished dresses. When Xaviera entered and her aunt saw her expression she sprang to her feet in alarm.

“What is it?” she cried. “You are ill, Xaviera? You have walked too fast, too far! Now why will you put yourself in such a condition, dear child?”

There was great kindness in her voice. The girl sat down heavily on the sofa, covering her face with her hands. She was

afraid. The look of high resolve had left that pale countenance, and the "sadness that was unto death" had taken possession of her once more. Aunt Winifred asked herself what secret trouble preyed upon this mind? What burden weighed upon this great, strong soul? What battle was it that waged so fiercely in this slender frame?

From the very moment of her installation as a member of their household both sisters had noticed her determination—a determination to succeed that never allowed her a moment's rest. She did not inherit that spirit from her father. Nor from her mother. From whom, then?

Winifred knew—for Xaviera was her sister Magdalen over again. Her sister Magdalen had failed—and the failure had embittered her, estranged her from all that made life worth living—nay, she, who had been so pious and so gentle, gave up God Himself, because of that one failure. Would Xaviera act so? Would Xaviera succeed in the resolve to forget that outside world from which she came? And if she did not, if she could not, what would be the consequences?

"We are surprised—Magdalen and I—that you do so splendidly," said Aunt Winifred, now, in her soft voice. "Discouragement comes to every one—no matter how well others think she is getting along. Perhaps you stay in the house too much—you are not used to it. Let your Aunt Winnie prescribe a good cup of tea for you—and send you out for a long, long walk. Do not come back for an hour."

She went inside and brought her a cup of tea, her panacea for all ills. Xaviera rose waveringly to her feet.

"Thank you, Aunt Winifred," she said. "Thank you. It will do me good, I know. And I must get out into the air—I shall

stifle if I stay in any longer. Do not worry about me—I may be late coming home.”

She had never gone down the path she had taken from the station since the day of her arrival—in fact she had been out very little save to church. The sun was setting, and it had grown perceptibly colder. Xaviera did not remember that she was a stranger and unacquainted with the country, that to wander very far away, especially at this hour, in the direction whither the path led now, was dangerous. She could not think. Some great shock had deprived her soul of its fortitude. She stumbled on blindly, seeing nothing. Nor did she take any note of time.

Fine little bits of sleet struck against her face. She paused in her aimless walk—it was beginning to snow. She had branched off at the crossroads and plunged along the outskirts of the town, winding up at the station. She was far from home, that she realized—an hour's good walk. But she could easily reach it in an hour. She was glad of the snow, and of the gusts of wind, and of the storm. She set her teeth. Here was something to fight in earnest—something material. The bridge was crossed—and there, dark and still, nestled the little cottage that had been her haven on that first evening, and whose owner had been so kind to her. She was tired. Here she would rest. And she would thank her for her friendliness.

With numbed fingers she pushed the gate open, and rapped upon the door. Even as she did so, an impulse came over her to fly. Why did she stop here? What comfort could this woman give her? She would talk—only talk—and surely she could not stand the sound of a human voice now. Steps came along the passageway—the next instant the door was thrown open. Every wrinkle in the well-remembered face seemed as familiar as if she

had known her all her life. Gazing at her, Xaviera was glad she had obeyed her impulse.

"You!" said the old woman, in accents of deepest surprise, and yet with a strange joy. And again, "You, you, you!" in tones of delight. "I'm so happy that you have come." She was drawing her inside even as she spoke. "It is bitter cold outdoors—and the wind! I have been listening to the howling of the wind this last hour—there will be a bad storm to-night. Why have you ventured out? Tell me." She peered at her anxiously. "This is not to keep your word—you are not leaving Segrovia?"

"No, no," said Xaviera. The trembling old voice filled her with strange longing. "Worse than a storm is threatening," she went on. "Worse than a storm is threatening me."

The choked voice, the pinched features, the evident misery of the girl made the old woman gaze at her more anxiously still.

"Come in," she said, "and rest, and have a glass of wine to warm you, if you must go out again."

Xaviera followed her into the sitting-room. Everything was as she remembered it. Plain and poor indeed, in its furnishings—very plain and poor, but exquisitely neat. At one side stood a deal table on which were crucifix and holy water font, with a prayer-stool, its cushion much worn from constant usage. Xaviera, without a word, sank upon her knees before the image of her Saviour. She raised her eyes—burning eyes set in pallid face—and her lips moved.

"Give me strength," she prayed. "Since I am denied peace just yet, dear Lord, give me strength."

"You will stay—if only for a little while?" asked Mrs. Thornton.

"No one ever comes here?" asked Xaviera, apathetically. She

did not think of the queerness of the question. She felt unreal, miserable. She felt that she was asleep—and she longed to wake from the frightful nightmare oppressing her. All she said and did seemed mechanical.

“No, you need not be afraid of meeting any one,” said Mrs. Thornton. “I am a widow—as you know, dear—and have no relatives who would care to seek me. Perhaps it is not good for one so old to be alone.” She was standing at the little table in the center of the room, handling the two thin glasses she had brought in on a cut-glass tray. It gave Xaviera a certain sense of pleasure to notice the delicacy of her movements. “Human nature is all alike, child. No one of us is meant to live apart from his fellow-man.”

“The only boon I ask,” said Xaviera, “is to be let live my life alone.”

“It will come,” said her old friend, comfortingly. “It will come.”

And then she drifted off into the past and Xaviera, more than willing, followed her. She told her much of her own family history, and the girl listened, the words, the voice, the cultured intonation of the woman seeming to soothe the fever in her breast.

After a brief space silence fell between them. Xaviera’s dark head rested easily on the back of her chair; once more that quietness, that repose of exterior that was her chief characteristic had a chance to assert itself.

“I am told you are a brave girl,” said Mrs. Thornton. “I have heard it said that the Misses Pomeroy will not lose custom through their niece. Is that true? You have really entered into the life they lead up there?”

“Really,” said Xaviera.

"Have they ever mentioned my name to you?" She gave her a curious side glance.

"Never," said the girl. "They are not communicative. And I, too, am reticent. I have never mentioned that my first night in Segrovia was spent under your roof."

"That is just as well. They will not care to hear my name, child. Prejudice is very strong in the old—do not annoy your aunts by repeating it. But I have often longed for you since. One evening I walked all the way up there to see if I could get just a glimpse of you. I saw your shadow on the blind—I knew your straight figure at once. Though Magdalen Pomeroy is as straight as you are to-day. Are you fond of your Aunt Magdalen?"

"She will not let me be," answered Xaviera.

"She and I were dear friends once—we loved each other passionately."

"You—and she?"

"Yes. Now there is no love left. Only on my side. I love her still."

"But why—"

"Magdalen would not marry William Thornton because of Frank, your father. Even to me she did not tell her thoughts—it was four years afterward that he asked me, and I consented."

"Aunt Magdalen—"

"No—she was not angry, then. But afterward— I can not tell you any more. She loved William—and he—loved her—first. Magdalen was very proud and haughty underneath. I do not think she and William would have been happy."

"Were you?"

"With my husband? Ah, yes, ah, yes. He was a good, good

man. I thought Magdalen would be glad. She said she was—she wrote me that she was. I did not marry him here in Segrovia. I was away. That is very long ago. I often think of it, and despite my happiness with him, perhaps it would have been better had we not married. I have had a sorrowful life. The only thing comforts me is that God knows best.”

She spoke with the hopelessness of one who has found the road a dreary one. Then she abruptly changed the subject.

“I stood watching you a full hour. What do you do up there in your room alone?”

“I have just got it into order,” answered Xaviera, touched by this evidence of interest in her. “And now I am laying out a course of reading for myself. I have had so little chance to read. And I write—”

“You—write—”

“Oh, not that way. Simply keep a record of my thoughts. Sometimes, when my mind has been wandering very far afield it takes a long time to get those thoughts into shape for the diary he will never see. Poor brother!” she finished, under her breath.

“Ah, well, ah, well!”

“Now that I am settled, you will come—”

Mrs. Thornton shrank.

“No, not to the Pomeroy. You will understand from what I have told you that I can not go there, dear. Magdalen Pomeroy—”

“Aunt Magdalen is old—she can not cherish any ill-feeling—” Xaviera paused; those burning eyes, that proud old face came before her. And Muriel Thornton interpreted the pause.

“I see you know your Aunt Magdalen. Tell me—try to think back a little. I did not care to ask you many questions that night you were here. You are sure you can not remember your mother?”

"No," said Xaviera. "You knew her, too—"

"Your father was a good-natured, happy, boyish fellow. Every one loved Frank Pomeroy. To think that all should be taken. All, all, all, and only the old are left!"

But Xaviera persisted.

"Why will you not tell me of my mother?" she asked. "Surely you knew my mother—"

"Yes," said Mrs. Thornton. "I knew your mother—she who took that boy from his home and from Magdalen—and carried him off with her into the world to die! Surely I knew of her."

Xaviera rose.

"If they loved each other?" she asked, her dark eyes on Muriel Thornton's face. "Is it such a crime to love and marry in Segrovia? Was it wrong? Was it wrong? Why should you blame her?" and her voice rose high. "Did you not love and marry as well as she?"

The old woman's head sank upon her breast.

"Not you," she said. "Do not turn against me—you, of all others—"

"No," said Xaviera. "No. You see, I do not understand. No one will tell me. What was wrong in two people falling in love, and marrying, and making their own lives—even if the path they trod led them away from Segrovia? You should have heard the Frank Pomeroy you praise speak of the woman who was our mother. It is a pleasant thing now for his daughter to look back upon—the tenderness he felt for his children's mother."

The clock on the mantel chimed the hour. Xaviera listened incredulously.

"Eleven!" she said. "Eleven o'clock! How dreadfully late I shall be. I must go—I won't reach my aunts' until near mid-

night. Good-night." She moved hastily to the door. "I will come again, soon—soon," she called back, as she moved with quick steps out into the dark.

The storm had set in fairly now, and the wind was shrieking and tearing at the rattling branches of the trees. But Xaviera was not afraid. The storm in her breast had subsided, partly, and she was not thinking of her own trouble as she set out bravely along the lonely way. She was a little annoyed that she had stayed so late—disturbed for fear that her aunts might be worried concerning her whereabouts. She had a hard fight against the wind—and she stood still a moment, holding up her muff to protect her nose and mouth. And then, without a single premonition, her limbs began to tremble. She was frightened—miserably frightened. Above the shriek of the wind she imagined that she heard a rough laugh. With straining ears she bent to listen. There it was again! She had surely come half the distance. Fear lent wings to her feet. Ten minutes' walk—no more—and she would be home. Nothing could happen to her—what could happen to her—who was abroad on such a night as this? Thus her sinking heart tried to buoy up her woman's frightened soul. And even as she tried to gather courage in this way, out of the darkness a man's figure took shape and substance, barring her path.

She tottered backward. The thing was so unexpected, so sudden, that all strength seemed to leave her. Her senses reeled. Then, still holding her muff so that it covered her face, she sought to pass him by, but he put his hand out, holding her by the arm. In the very teeth of the storm he was smoking, and he puffed at his cigar so that its red end glowed, and putting up his other hand drew the shield away. Her frightened, terrified eyes met

his. He laughed a low laugh of triumph, and releasing her, passed on without a word.

And Xaviera stood as a statue might. She could not move. Her limbs were frozen, not with cold, but horror. The snow settled upon her coat, rested thick upon her hair. She felt nothing, knew nothing.

Then some one came up behind her, stopped, spoke, received no reply. He took her by the arm. She thought it was the man who had left her, returning, but her throat was paralyzed. She could not cry out. She could do nothing, say nothing.

"Who are you?" asked a strange voice—a harsh and cutting voice. "A madwoman, that is certain and sure, if nothing else, to seek your death in this fashion. Or is this a more up-to-date style of committing suicide—to freeze standing? Who are you?"

The calm contempt of that voice was the one thing needed to rouse the girl from the fearful stupor into which her fright had thrown her. This, this was the end of all! She was stung to the quick. She had suffered much in the world from which she came, but at least in their conversation they had been deferent. A feeling of self-hatred filled her proud heart. She, who had sacrificed so much that she might be let alone—What was this daring stranger—

"Who are you? Where is your home?" asked the gentleman again—and this time quite impatiently. He shook her arm once or twice to emphasize his insistence on a reply.

"I have had many homes," said Xaviera, in a tense voice. "And I have been many things. But nothing, so far, that can compel the courteous attention of a gentleman on a public road. I will thank you to go on about your business, and leave me to follow mine."

The man was dumbfounded. For an instant his eyes glared at her.

"You are Magdalen Pomeroy's niece," he said. "Do you know what hour it is? Do you know that in a storm such as this, if you wander much farther you are apt to perish in the snow?"

"Thank you. My feet are not wandering—neither is my head. I know the way perfectly. I will be obliged to you if you will release my arm."

"I must at least accompany you to your home. You are a newcomer here," he said, in cold accents. "Seldom are any of the old residents to be found on the roads on such a night. It is not safe."

"I do not wish to bandy words," said Xaviera, haughtily. "It is my will to do as I please, and it pleases me that you shall go your way, and allow me to go mine."

"Whatever your will may be my way lies in your direction. Miss Pomeroy is my neighbor—"

"Whom you would not for the world have scandalized!" mocked Xaviera.

"Put any construction you please upon it. I go with you."

Without another word the girl turned her face in the direction of the Pomeroy's white cottage. He walked beside her in silence. The way was rough, but her whole body was as straight as though there were no storm, no gale. She did not even bend her head. Just once this composure failed her—and then only for a second. Something like a sigh crossed her lips. She stood still, as if to get her breath. He waited, putting his hand on her arm once more—and the touch nerved her for the rest of the distance. She drew away quickly. If she could have seen his eyes then she would have read the great pity in their depths.

When they reached the Pomeroy gate, her common sense made effort to reassert itself.

"You see—the way—was entirely—without danger," she panted. "I am sorry—you put yourself—"

"It was no trouble. The house seems dark. Are you sure it is all right? Can you get in?"

"Yes. I generally retire early—they believe, I suppose, that I am in bed. But the back door—is always left unlocked. Allow me to bid you good-night."

"Good-night. I shall stand here until I am assured that you are safely inside. Strike a match when you reach your room. I know which one it is."

Xaviera obeyed him. He held the gate open for her, and she passed him, going along the side of the house to the back. When she reached her room she struck a match. The light flared up—then as suddenly was extinguished. She did not look to see whether or no her unwelcome escort had kept his word, but, hastily slipping off her outside garments, which were wringing wet, and her shoes, she crept into bed—where she lay, shaken and sleepless until morning.

CHAPTER VII.

THE NEWCOMER.

THERE was enough to do for the following weeks to keep Xaviera Pomeroy busily at work. She had a woman's natural liking for restoring order out of chaos, and her aunts, seeing that she was miserable when unoccupied, let her do exactly as she pleased. Despite their own rather finicky neatness, things had been somewhat neglected. Both were old—perhaps they were not so observant as they had been in earlier days, and, too, while Segrovia differed from no other small up-State town in the economy of its inhabitants, still there were enough "best" people there to keep the Pomeroy's busy. Besides that, in the summer it thrived very well. Summer was its prosperous season, for then visitors flocked to the mountains.

Many called on the Pomeroy's now just to see the strange niece who had come to Segrovia to take up her abode with them—and afterward to note the change she was making in their dwelling. Her taste was more educated, her knowledge fresher, her suggestions bright and always apt. Xaviera, who had never in all her life exerted herself to make a friend, tried now to be pleasant to the simple country-folk who treated her with such respectful curiosity. Yet, no matter how she tried, there was one enemy to popularity she could not conquer—and that was her own innate reserve. Her affableness could never be anything but condescension.

Aunt Winifred loved her—that much was certain. And Xaviera knew it. But the barrier of silence between Magdalen and her niece had never been removed. She did not try to remove it. She would not force confidence nor give it. Every Saturday evening the sisters counted up the profits of the week, dividing them into three shares, of which Xaviera took hers. They never spoke of her, never discussed her movements—but Aunt Winifred watched, with much uneasiness, the constant and ever-growing intercourse between Xaviera and Phyllis Gordon. The great reticence of their niece regarding her past life was responsible for this. They knew that she had been constantly in the society of such people as Phyllis was, and such people as made the friends Phyllis delighted in having. Simple and primitive in feeling, Aunt Winifred believed that classes had a right to be exclusive, and since Xaviera had elected to cast her lot with them there was no need to be reaching out for things above her. So little did they understand the heart and soul of Xaviera Pomeroy.

It was a Sunday early in March, and it was raining; and both these things combined to make the house dull. Winifred, yawning, went to the window to look out, as she heard the quick rattling of the gate. The bang, as the visitor shut it, woke Aunt Magdalen, who had fallen asleep over a newspaper. Phyllis Gordon was picking her way along the plank walk to the house. Aunt Winifred waited what seemed to be a long time. But the girl did not enter the sitting-room. There was no sign of the visitor in the hall save the soaking umbrella she had placed in the corner, and from which a small pool of water had already formed on the floor. Shaking her head over such carelessness, Aunt Winifred set it in the little umbrella pan back of the door, and then looked disapprovingly at the muddy tracks on the stairs.

"Who is it?" asked Magdalen's harsh voice.

"Miss Gordon. She has just gone up to Xaviera's room," said Aunt Winifred. "Strange! One would think that a little thing like her would be afraid to venture out on such a day as this."

"It is getting thicker," said Magdalen, scornfully.

Winifred looked at her sister with a question in her face.

"That fashionable riffraff clings together," said Magdalen, in the harsh, rasping manner habitual to her. "They know the girl has mixed with high society—higher than they can touch. They want to draw her out—perhaps have her play for them as she played for this princess or that my lady, so that they can boast of it. They wish to draw her back into their life. I know them—every one of them."

Magdalen had never expressed herself so openly. In fact, she had always treated Winifred as a sort of nonentity. Winifred listened.

"What if they do?" she asked—although Magdalen was voicing her very sentiments, almost, one might say, her fears.

"Let her go! I expect it any moment. What was her motive in coming?" Magdalen became suddenly furious. "Tell me that, Winifred. Was it love for us? Was it affection? She hates us! She despises us! I see it in every action—and the only reason I tolerate it is because I am curious. Curious to know what is the secret impulse that brings her here and keeps her here. The daughter of such a mother—"

"Hush!" said Winifred. "You are doing Xaviera an injustice—and being unjust is not one of your usual faults, Magdalen. We have spent many years together, you and I, my sister," she went on gently, "and I have noticed that you are much

change since Xaviera came. You do not want her here, maybe? She reminds you of the past, of—”

“She identifies herself with my enemies! What right has she to visit—how *dare* she visit Muriel Thornton? Is there anything else needed to make me hate the girl?”

“She visits Muriel Thornton? Oh, no!” cried Winifred, aghast.

“And then sits at the table with us, sees us, speaks to us, works with us—hour after hour, day after day—and says nothing! Nothing, nothing, nothing! Who is—”

“She will hear you,” warned Winifred, hastily. “Oh, Magdalen, if that is the way you feel—if her presence here is such a torment to you—let us send her away.”

Her voice broke over the last words. It cost her much to say them, for she loved her. But Magdalen laughed shrilly.

“Send her away? Where? To Muriel Thornton? Not while I can prevent it.”

Winifred shivered, and her eyes filled. Magdalen was old now—much older than she. Who knew how long she had to live? And was it not an awful thing that so old a woman could entertain such bitter hatred for another? Could even contemplate facing eternity with that hatred upon her soul?

“She might not go to Muriel Thornton,” ventured Winifred; “and she probably knows nothing of—”

“She knows all. It would be Muriel’s policy to tell her all, so that she might win her away from us. You are a fool. Who knows what story she has told her even now to awaken her sympathy? She knows something, that is certain. One realizes that by her coldness.”

“It is not Xaviera’s fault that she is cold,” said Winifred.

"Why must she talk to us of her affairs when we do not seem interested in her? You never ask her a single question about herself—and I can not, because of you. Often, when we are alone together, she becomes almost affectionate. No. The girl has suffered a great deal—she can not be like others. And if we want to win her confidence we must forget our own peculiarities as well. Once more I repeat that you are unjust, Magdalen."

The other did not answer.

"Let us do what is fair and honest," went on Winifred, with more spirit than she usually showed before her stronger-willed, more stubborn sister. "She came to us as our brother's daughter—my brother's as well as yours, Magdalen, even though I did not do as much for him as you, being only a year older than he, and a child with him. She asked us to take her for his sake, and we have done so. She has given us no cause for regret, though she has been with us three months or more. Until she does give us cause let us treat her as she treats us. So far she has been an actual blessing—little short of a Godsend."

Magdalen Pomeroy did not answer. But if Winifred could have seen her eyes she would have known that they were wet with tears.

* * * * *

Meanwhile, Phyllis, after finding her way to the floor above—the first time she had ever intruded on Xaviera's privacy, but impelled to it by the fact that she had seen her sitting at her window—knocked softly at the door. She, being a curious little creature, was anxious to see the inside of Xaviera's guarded room. Xaviera admitted her, extending a welcoming hand.

"Oh!" said Phyllis, with a little cry of rapture. "Oh!" She threw aside her rain coat—she had been thoughtful enough

to remove her rubbers in the hall—and ran across to the divan with its luxurious cushions. “Oh! And you said Aunt Mary’s was beautiful! Oh, Xaviera! Isn’t this wonderful! This is what I love! Oh, you wicked friend! You knew I was pining for this—for just one glimpse of the dear, delightful things of my Egyptian days—and here you had them hidden away and would not let me enter! Oh! If Aunt Mary could ever see this room—this glorious room! Where did you get the tapestries? Xaviera, that’s a genuine peachblow—that vase! I know it! And that rug! Oh, that darling of a rug! Xaviera, Xaviera, where did you get them all?”

“They are reminiscences of past and gone days,” said Xaviera, smiling at her enthusiasm.

“Did I not say you were a princess in disguise who stoops to sew for the barbarians of Segrovia? Yes, you are a princess in one of the fairy tales—a princess who has broken men’s hearts, because you are so beautiful, and you have been sent here, away out of your kingdom to do penance. And you shall do penance,” Phyllis clapped her hands, “until the prince comes.”

“Now I know what your talent is,” said Xaviera. “You will write romances.”

“Romance writer in extraordinary to Princess Xaviera! There, what a title! Xaviera, tell me, tell your friend. You’re not a princess, really?”

“You will go home this moment if you don’t stop,” said Xaviera, sternly, but her eyes were smiling. “How dare you?”

“But you must tell me where you got them. Tell me—and I shall be good.”

“They belonged to both of us—to me and to Frank—and are consequently dear by association,” said Xaviera, dreamily. “I

could not bear to part with them—he loved them all so. And to keep them packed up would have been sacrilege.”

“I grant that!” said Phyllis. “Why, it is glorious just to live here. No wonder I like beautiful things—I am glad I do! Even you are different, Xaviera—you are different in this room. You seem milder; you do not put such restraint on yourself. You are natural. You have lost your reserve—these are your proper surroundings.”

She leaned her chin on her dainty palms, and surveyed her friend keenly. She was beginning to learn from her. She was beginning to understand something that had never been brought home to her. Truly, as she had described it, religion or God was but a name—a vague, far away, distant thing, which had naught to do with her brilliant, butterfly existence. But still she was as a child groping in the dark. As Magdalen Pomeroy could not read the motive of her niece’s conduct, so, too, did Phyllis Gordon look for it in vain, unwilling to take the girl’s word that it was heartsickness of sham. Why, why, had this incomprehensible creature given up so much to be satisfied with so little? Was it not pride? And the pride that Phyllis knew was so different to Xaviera’s! There was pride in the cold, calm face, in the erect, beautiful body. Was she not stubborn? And yet to whose detriment? Concerning the things of this earth—which meant everything to Phyllis. She thought of her growing older and still older in this place—“this horrid, dreadful, lonely place!” She saw the slim body bent, the shoulders stooped, the raven hair gray, the lips sunken, the hands knotted—and Phyllis clasped her own hands, shuddering.

“It is not possible,” she said. “I will not believe it.”

Xaviera neither questioned nor commented. She was debat-

ing, just then, whether or not it pleased her to see this beautiful, frivolous girl in the place kept sacred to her own thoughts so long. She loved solitude—and here she had found it. There was no memory of any other personality—but her own and her dear brother's—between these walls. Would recollection of Phyllis annoy her—

But these were surmises induced by living too much within herself. She would banish them, they were selfish. She would subordinate them to the greater task—the task of bringing home God's greatness and overreaching love to this unawakened soul. All things—all comfort, all pleasure, must be kept subservient to that one great task. She had resolved, and the quickening of the resolution might be seen now in the suddenly bright eyes as she rose from her chair, and coming forward, put her arm about Phyllis' shoulder.

"You said you had a surprise for me this morning. Tell me what it is," she said.

The girl's eyes sparkled.

"*Such* a surprise! Life is looking worth while again. Tell me, did you ever see that big white house right beyond Aunt Mary's place? Mr. Horace Waverly owns it."

Xaviera nodded.

"I have seen the house, but never knew whose property it was," she said. "Why—is it Mr. Waverly, Phyllis?"

She spoke mischievously. Phyllis laughed.

"No—it is not. But some weeks ago Mr. Waverly had a friend come to him for the shooting. He's stayed ever since. His name is Allison Frayer."

"Yes?" asked Xaviera.

"I met him last evening—for the first time. He was at our

house." Phyllis looked at her friend keenly from under her long lashes. "You know how talk goes? Well, there have been rumors that this Englishman—he is an Englishman—is not a plain esquire at all, but a real, live lord. Is he?"

Xaviera smiled sarcastically.

"Do you think I have the British peerage-list at my fingertips? Why ask me?"

"He knows you, Xaviera."

"That may be—at one time 'everybody that was anybody,' as the saying goes, knew me."

The disdain in her voice did not affect Phyllis this time—she was too curious.

"Conversation turned on you last evening—he told us many stories of your triumphs in the different countries—in fact, he spoke as if he knew you very well."

In spite of herself, Xaviera's lips trembled.

"What did he say of me?" she asked, in a voice she tried to render easy.

"Oh, it was an enigmatical discussion—and an exciting one. Dr. Fawcett was there. Did you ever see Dr. Fawcett with his hat off? His head is like a lion's mane, and his big eyes glare at you as if he wanted to eat you alive. Uff! He comes to our house every single day, stays a few seconds— And to see Aunt Mary, then! Her kindness is really touching. That's the doctor I told you of, who was to capture my hand and heart, according to the correspondence between Aunt Isabel and the Honorable Mrs. Browne, relict of the late Thomas John!" Phyllis wrinkled her nose. "Honestly, Xaviera, the man may think he is courting me—but—" She burst out laughing. "People look upon him as a sort of prodigy here—and every morning his virtues are held up to

me until I can tell them off by heart. Perhaps you would like to hear them? First—”

“No, no,” said Xaviera. “Spare me.”

“Well, then, they were all to our house last evening—to go back again. Mr. Waverly and Mr. Frayer and the doctor. The conversation turned on you. Only you. You could have heard a pin drop. Mr. Frayer said you had the strongest will-power of any man or woman whom he had ever met. That there was no obstacle you could not crush—that with your iron will you should be a ruling power in the world. And when I said that you had come to this place determined to live out your life among country people, with your aunts—he laughed.

“‘Depend upon it, Miss Pomeroy has something else in view besides a future in Segrovia,’ he said.”

An ironical smile played about Xaviera’s lips.

“Aunt Mary accused me of being fascinated with you—and held up our daily intercourse as evidence. And then Mr. Frayer—Xaviera, I wish you could have heard him! His language is so polished, so delicate! He spoke of your many talents, your high principles, the friends you had made and left, of your brother—”

“He spoke of my brother?” burst from Xaviera’s heaving bosom. “Of my brother?”

“Ah, do not feel so badly, dear. It was high praise indeed—I almost cried when he touched on that subject, he did it so sympathetically. In fact, he has impressed Aunt Mary so that she wants you to come to her next Saturday afternoon—”

“What! Deliberately seek that from which I came? You should know better than to ask me, Phyllis. What is your aunt—or those people—to me?”

The fine scorn in her voice made Phyllis shrink back, abashed.

"Mr. Frayer showed me a picture of his little daughter—his wife died two years ago," she said, in a changed voice. "Tell me, Xaviera, is he a lord? Or is it only nonsense?"

"What good will it do you to know?" asked Xaviera. "Rest assured he is not the sort of man who would or could make any woman happy. He is as wicked as he is handsome."

"He may be wicked—he is certainly handsome," said Phyllis. "But is he a prophet?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because he told me that you would not come—that you were afraid to meet him. Why, Xaviera?"

"One scarcely wishes to meet those whom one—dislikes! And I dislike Mr. Frayer very much."

"The doctor, too, declared you would not come."

"The doctor?" said Xaviera, musingly. "He gave a reason?" Phyllis was silent.

"He gave a reason?" Xaviera laughed. "He said my audience would be too small! Is that the reason, Phyllis?"

Phyllis looked surprised.

"Not exactly that—he said you would rather play to crowded houses. Xaviera—you can't know the doctor, too?"

"No—I never met him until I came to Segrovia. But he is as other men. I know human nature, Phyllis."

"I wish you would try to overcome your prejudice just this once," said Phyllis Gordon, impulsively. "Just this once, Xaviera—and I shall never ask you again. Come, if only to justify my belief in you."

"No, not for that reason," said Xaviera, rising. But she smiled in a way that Phyllis had never observed before. "I shall come, Phyllis—just this—once."

CHAPTER VIII.

PASSED DANGER.

WHEN the Honorable Mrs. Browne understood that Xaviera Pomeroy meant to accept her invitation for the following Saturday, she strove, first of all, to think how best she might satisfy the curiosity of those friends and neighbors of hers who were anxious to meet the girl. None of them had kindlier motive than criticism, for she was, in truth, the chief topic of conversation in the town now. So that, when Saturday afternoon came, over a dozen of the "very nicest" people, to quote Phyllis, were seated in the Honorable Mrs. Browne's drawing-room. As a matter of courtesy, but much to Aunt Mary's misery, the piano had to be thrown open. It was a remarkable fact that this woman, harsh-looking, strong, unpleasantly aggressive, almost without nerves, was, in respect to music, very sensitive. Ordinary playing, to her, meant the height of irritation, and the sound of an ordinary human voice upraised in singing drove her to despair. She had not had much chance to acquire this trait in Segrovia—it was a characteristic from her childhood days that had always clung to her. She listened now, inwardly miserable, while her guests played and sang and were applauded. Phyllis, who could do both herself in a pleasing way, desisted out of very pity. In a dainty blue gown, her face flushed with excitement, Phyllis was indeed a vision.

"What a pity a girl like that should be wasted in Segrovia," said Mr. Frayer.

She had just passed them, animated, sparkling, beautiful, and

his eyes followed her with the gaze of one who finds nothing to object to. Horace Waverly nodded. He had two charming daughters of his own—but Phyllis! He had never seen a girl like Phyllis. He said so. Mr. Frayer turned to the window, from which he had allowed his attention to stray—in fact he had merely made that casual remark to keep his vis-à-vis from noticing his abstraction. For his eyes were riveted on the narrow street and the road that led beyond—that narrow path down which Xaviera Pomeroy must come on her way to the house if she came at all. The tall, fair-haired, aristocratic-looking stranger heard little of what went on around him. It was no wonder Phyllis pronounced him a cavalier—he looked the aristocrat, the gallant, from head to toe—and yet his elegance was quiet, his manner, if pleasant and possessing certain charm, reserved.

A wagon came tearing down the street past the house. Mr. Waverly was leaning forward, listening to his daughter, who stood at the piano, singing, in a sweet young voice, an old-time ballad. Frayer heard nothing; he watched the vehicle as it drove past, saw it rock from side to side, and noticed that the driver, hastily thrusting out his head from the open side, cast a glance backward, looked around as if frightened, and, then, plying his whip, sent his horse dashing down the hilly path. Mr. Frayer did not understand the meaning of this pantomime, nor did he take time to wonder at it, since suddenly, at the top of the street, he saw the figure he had waited for so long.

He had command of himself—nevertheless, his fingers twitched and his pupils contracted nervously as he watched the swaying, graceful walk he knew so well, the poise of the dark head. He could scarcely breathe. She came on, unconscious of that scrutiny, and stood at the gate with her hand on the latch,

her attention attracted by something lying in the road. She hesitated—the expression of her face changed. There was perplexity in it, and anxiety. Still gazing, she let the latch fall and walked away. With a muttered exclamation Frayer jumped to his feet.

“Curse it!” he said. “Doesn’t she know the house?”

Waverly looked up at him in great surprise, noting the unwonted excitement of the man.

“What is the matter?” he asked, his eyes following Frayer’s. And then, “My God! What is it? A child, as I live!”

By this time the attention of all in the room had been attracted and they came crowding to the windows. Xaviera, stooping, had picked up a little boy from the ground. He was dusty and dirty, and one tiny limb hung helpless. She stood with him in her arms, speaking to him tenderly, and trying to settle the little body so that she might not hurt him. He was crying. Frayer, with another exclamation turned to the door, rushed out of the room, and was down the pebbled path—holding the gate wide for her.

“You can’t hold him,” he said, harshly. “Give him to me, Xaviera.”

She looked at him coldly, and at the others who had followed him. The child’s arms were about her neck, and his piteous moans were in her ears. They hurt her. She spoke to him once more.

“It will be all right, Danny, dear,” she said. “Dear little boy, try not to cry so.”

Mrs. Browne, calm and severe, came out, and stood beside Mr. Frayer.

“What is it?” she asked, haughtily.

"I do not know," said Xaviera, simply. "I found the child dragging himself along the ground at your door. Is there a doctor here who can attend to him? If not, I shall carry him home with me at once—"

"No, no," interposed Mr. Frayer, hastily. "Surely you will not permit that, Mrs. Browne? The young lady would not be able to carry him far—and the child may die. Let me take him from you, I beg," he continued, courteously.

But Danny only clung the tighter. A broad-shouldered, sturdy figure now appeared at the hall-door. The next moment Dr. Fawcett was among them.

"What is it? The child is injured? Why do you stand out here gaping? Bring him in—at once, at once." He spoke authoritatively—then leaned toward the little chap.

"Come, boy, come," he said, in a low voice—but Xaviera felt the difference. "Come—you are too heavy for the young lady."

Danny's little hands tightened.

"She won't go away," said Dr. Fawcett. "If you will let me take you, she will stay with you just the same."

"Do, dear," said Xaviera. "The gentleman will not hurt you as much as I in carrying you up the stairs."

She looked at Dr. Fawcett then, for Danny cried again—his moans had subsided into a little whimper, very weak and faint, and all the strength left to him was centered in the clasp of his arms about her neck.

"I shall carry him," she said. "He will not let go." She turned toward the house.

"You must not bring him into the drawing-room," said Mrs. Browne, in a displeased voice. "I don't see why people—"

"That will do, that will do," said Dr. Fawcett, curtly. "You

can't turn him away, can you? Have a little sense, woman. Isn't there some room—"

"Take mine," said Phyllis, quickly. "You can have my room, Dr. Fawcett."

His eyes rested on her kindly. She blushed as she led the way.

"Could anything be more theatrical than that?" asked Horace Waverly, with a sarcastic smile. "I am afraid Miss Pomeroy is striving after effect."

"She didn't have the boy run over on purpose, did she?" asked Frayer. He was very much irritated. "Little cub! He held on like grim death—"

"She is really the well-known Miss Pomeroy—"

"Do you think there could be two like her in the world?" asked Allison Frayer. He seemed to be laboring under strong excitement. "Two Xaviera Pomeroy's! Absurd!"

"Get her to entertain us later on! It will be a treat to hear something worth while up here. If I could get rid of this weakness of the lungs I would not stay in Segrovia a week."

"There are worse places than Segrovia," said Frayer, moodily. "It is environment, association, that makes the wilderness a paradise." He laughed. "Many people would be glad to exchange brighter scenes for Segrovia—with Xaviera Pomeroy's companionship."

"I hear she is an ardent Catholic," said Waverly. "Perhaps that has something to do with her voluntary self-seclusion. That religion always struck me as being ascetical—"

"Miss Pomeroy has a will of her own—and a way," said Philippa Waverly, approaching her father and their guest. "We, who have come to meet her, and are dying to see her, must wait until she gets through dancing attendance on a little beggar-boy."

"Dr. Fawcett did not even ask Mrs. Browne's permission—told her to have a little sense," put in Mrs. Bludgitt, one of the guests who had followed Philippa. "Simply took matters in his own hands."

"Some of us can be glad he does," said Constance Waverly, a tall, fair, soft-spoken girl. She looked at her father as she spoke, and he smiled—for Constance was the dearest thing in the world to him. "He saved mother's life last year by being dictatorial."

"Here he comes now." They looked toward the door. Aunt Mary, with her nose high in the air, advanced to meet him.

"One of your servants is on his way to the child's home with him," said Dr. Fawcett, in tones loud enough for all to hear. "Fortunately the bone escaped shattering—but he is badly cut and bruised, and has lost much blood. He'll probably die from the shock. I wonder how it happened? The idea of any human being in Segrovia injuring a child in that fashion, and leaving it on the road to perish. If I find out who did it, I'll make him suffer. Segrovia is not so large a place that such a thing can be hidden long!"

He was thoroughly angry. Mrs. Browne shrugged her shoulders.

"Did Miss Pomeroy go—"

"She is with Miss Phyllis—they will be down presently."

"With Miss Phyllis!" said Aunt Mary, in a disgusted tone. "That means that Phyllis will forget all and everything but—There they are. It's a wonder!"

They entered the room together—Xavier dressed in simple black, the diamond cross upon her bosom glittering. Phyllis, with a proud expression on her beautiful face, was holding her hand, and brought her over to her aunt, who proceeded, then, to intro-

duce her to the guests. Mr. Frayer, tall and courteous, stood beside her.

"I have had the honor," he said, bowing, "under happier circumstances. In Naples—and in London—Miss Pomeroy and I knew each other quite well."

Xaviera looked at him—steadily, fearlessly.

"Quite well?" And the ghost of a smile touched her lips. "We met, I believe. But quite well? Pardon me if I fail to remember!"

He was not disconcerted.

"I was but one poor moth among many," he said. "I could not ask you to remember. Perhaps, after a while, it may not be so hard."

Xaviera smiled and turned away. She had a gracious manner when she pleased—and now, indeed, she wanted to make these people like her, since she meant to live out all her days among them. She stood with Mrs. Bludgitt and the Waverly girls, with Phyllis hovering about them like a bright-winged butterfly, happy and proud of her friend. Already the serious, thoughtful Constance Waverly had fallen victim to Xaviera's charm—and Phyllis felt that she loved her for it. The moments fairly flew. At last Mr. Frayer approached them.

"I have been telling them how beautifully you play," he said, "and sing. Will you give just one small selection from your repertoire?"

Xaviera lifted her eyes. Dr. Fawcett, standing close to them, had heard the request—and involuntarily his glance sought her face. She met that glance of his full—and such mockery as lighted her features, played about her lips for one moment's time!

It was meant for him alone, and it angered him. Why— He waited for her answer.

"I neither play nor sing, any more," she said, "save at rare intervals. I never touch the piano, and the harp—which once I played rather well—I have given up for ever."

There was a general protest at this—with one exception. Aunt Mary stood silent, a sarcastic smile on her lips.

"Let us beg of you," said Philippa Waverly.

"For my sake!" said Phyllis. "Xaviera, I have never heard you, as long as I know you."

"I dislike being urged—I am afraid you will think me disagreeable," said Xaviera. "But I have taken a vow that I shall never play or sing again before an audience—large or small—unless, indeed, it may be in church."

She spoke so decidedly, and yet with such sweetness, that they could say nothing more. Dr. Fawcett's stern eyes were on her pale face, and Phyllis, looking at him, became conscious of some deep feeling in that gaze that she could not understand. Contrasted to the polite, almost exquisite manner of Mr. Frayer, the doctor's brusqueness had repelled the thoughtless girl. But now she made up her mind that he was really interesting. His hair fell over his big forehead in a way that gave him an appearance of careless power. His steady eyes, his strong profile, all bespoke determination equal to Xaviera's own. How would it be, she wondered, if those two wills ever came into opposition?

"And that is the village dressmaker!" said Mrs. Bludgitt, with a queer laugh.

"Oh, you see how impossible it is!" said Aunt Mary. "No girl of her ability would do a thing of this sort. Only that Mr. Frayer vouched for her in such emphatic terms I should scarcely

have ventured to ask her here. But it is well to be on the safe side—and Mr. Frayer is other than he seems. It is said that he is traveling incognito—he stands in line to be an English earl!”

“What a great honor for Segrovia!” said Mrs. Bludgitt. “How did the Waverlys ever get him?”

“Mr. Waverly is an Englishman—I suppose they were acquainted. These are only rumors, of course. You know I have nothing but hearsay.” At the same time she looked at her companion with an expression that told her she could tell her more if she would.

“The Waverlys always get the best of everything,” said Mrs. Bludgitt, in a discontented voice. “I suppose they’ll marry him to Constance—she’s the eldest.”

Again the Honorable Mrs. Browne looked very wise. If Phyllis—

It was growing dark when Xaviera bade her hostess farewell, and went out into the hall. Phyllis, rising to accompany her, was detained.

“Do not go until I come,” she called after her friend. “Wait for me—I have something to tell you.” Xaviera found Mr. Frayer in the hall, alone. He had sent the servant away on some pretext, and now, when the girl came out, he turned to her eagerly.

“You will surely allow me to accompany you part of the distance?” he began.

Xaviera drew back, smiling.

“You would outrage all the proprieties?” she asked. “You are amusing.”

“Proprieties! In Segrovia!” The words came forth quickly. “Must I ask forgiveness on my knees? Would that satisfy you? I shall show you how much Segrovia, or any one in it, is to me—

saving only you. I will go back with you to that room, and throw myself at your feet and implore your pity. Would that be sweet revenge? Have I not suffered enough? How long is my punishment to last? Why do you think I followed you here? You know I was never happy. And you! You have never married—you have never loved since then! Shall I let you go now that I am free? You torture me. To think that you, you, you whom I worship should condescend to the prattling tongues of this vile town—should stoop to enter that vile hovel it pleases you to call your home! Come now, come now—just as you are, and leave it all. For one smile from you I would conquer the world!”

The man’s passion fairly carried him away. His tones, earnest, ringing, sent the blood coursing more quickly through the girl’s veins.

“You know what lies before you as my wife—you know what you shall be, what you shall do. What honors I can heap upon you—what honors—”

“I beg of you to cease,” said Xaviera, earnestly. “And again I beg it of you. The life you picture is gone. The way I follow now lies beyond.”

“Yes, beyond—out into the world you love in your secret heart.”

“I do not.”

“You do. Your life lies with me, with me, with me.” He spoke exultantly. “You dare not look at me and deny it. You are afraid of me! Do you think I shall give you up, ever? I, who have traced you over two continents! You shall never escape me. You belong to me, and if I can’t win you by fair means—I shall by others.”

“Which I expect,” said Xaviera, scornfully. “Since a man

like you has no scruples. Go, then. Go from house to house and tell what tale you will. I stand alone."

"Will their scorn be less easy to bear than—"

"Their scorn! Contrast these people with Xaviera Pomeroy's will, and ask yourself what chance they have to conquer it. I set my value on myself—and no one such as you can underrate me. Afraid of them—or afraid of you!" She laughed under her breath. "Afraid of you—poor, paltry, miserable creature, who swore eternal fidelity to me, and then, going, took that patient soul from her father's house and, because you made her your wife, thought you had the right to torture her to death with your heartlessness! She, who died for love of you! Ah, you are shameless as well as heartless! And I, to be afraid of you! Why, I do not hate you nor fear you, because my contempt is so bitter that there is room for no other feeling."

They did not hear the drawing-room door open, neither of them. Phyllis, coming out into the hall saw both figures—the man, white as death, with clenched hands, staring at the face of the woman, whose bitter words stung him to impotent rage. It was tragical—and Phyllis felt it so. She drew back quietly, laying her hand on Dr. Fawcett's arm, whose brow had darkened, whose eyes flashed strangely. He, too, took in the import of that scene. And it displeased him.

* * * * *

Xaviera did not go home. She had dreaded this meeting almost mortally. Now that it was over, her heart beat high. She *had* been afraid. The presence of Allison Frayer brought back the misery of the past, the memory of her brother, and the circumstances attending his untimely death. In the silence and darkness of the night he had passed her, striving to impress that

fear upon her soul—for he had known as well as she that she was afraid. She thanked God now.

She made her way to the small wooden chapel where Father Powers said Mass every other Sunday. She knew it would be open at this hour, and she was longing to tell God her joy of heart, to pour forth her glad soul to Him. She and Father Powers were good friends—Segrovia was but a mission, one of five which the priest had to take care of, and there was only a sprinkling of Catholics in the town. He had asked her—struck by the quiet piety of the girl (revealed to him not so much by speech as by actions) to attend to the little things so necessary for the Divine Service, and the beautiful linen altar cloth and the general air of neatness prevailing in God's humble home this past few months had been due, in part, to her unremitting care. It was really her haven of refuge—her hope. Here she could bring her tired heart. And Father Powers, when he was home, placed the Blessed Sacrament in the little tabernacle, knowing that before long it would have one loving worshiper.

Hither she went then, drawn by the love that binds us Catholics together the world over. Nor would her heart be satisfied with silent prayer. Father Powers, reading his breviary in the cold sacristy with his overcoat about him, pacing up and down while he waited for those of his parishioners who were coming to confession, suddenly became conscious of a new touch upon the keys of the organ—new and tender fingers, bringing out new and tender notes. And then her voice—the voice she had declined to exercise that day to gain human praise, took up the anthem. Father Powers let his book drop and stood still, as the Latin words filled the little church, sonorous, deep, beautiful, the pronunciation purely Italian. He listened in rapture, with tears

standing in his eyes. In a long, long time he had not been so deeply moved.

When the music ceased at last he took his place in the confessional, for he was well aware that she never lost such an opportunity. Those who knew her would scarcely have recognized her when she came out again. In the joy of her soul she seemed like a new being. She would succeed; she would conquer!

"You see, I have heard you play," said Dr. Fawcett. He was leaning against the door, his arms folded across his breast. The dim light fell on the face she uplifted to his. It was transfigured, glorified; the eyes were sparkling, the lips smiling. "And I have heard you sing."

"I am glad," said Xaviera, and the music of her voice fell pleasantly upon his listening ears. "And after having heard those two most wonderful things—my playing and my singing—go to Father Powers to get rid of the disappointment that fills your soul."

There was a laugh in her voice—a gayety of manner so utterly unknown and unobserved before, that the man's grave face lighted up.

"I came for that purpose," he said—and then as she passed him, "I am glad we are one in faith, Miss Pomeroy."

"Yes," said Xaviera. "It makes a lot of difference in one's attitude toward another. I did not know you were a Catholic like myself."

She was strangely happy—anxious to be up and doing—anxious not to lose these moments of surcease from terror—the first she had known in many days. She passed, on her way, the miserable little dwelling that had been pointed out to her as the home in which Danny and his sister lived. They were the two

children she had met at her aunts' door that first day in Segrovia. A faint light shone through the curtainless window, and going toward it, she peered in. The figure of a little girl was seated at the table, with her head upon her arms. She was fast asleep. On a cot in the corner lay Danny, tossing helplessly. Xaviera, with some difficulty, made her way to the door and entered. She went to the boy and put her hand on his burning forehead.

"What is it, dear?" she asked, bending over him tenderly.

"Water," he whispered. "Water. I want a drink of water." His eyes were bright with fever.

Xaviera touched Elizabeth's arm. The child sprang up in affright.

"Where is the water?" she asked. "Show me so that I may give your little brother a drink. You know who I am, don't you?"

"Yes," she replied, without hesitation.

She brought the water from a pail in the corner of the room, and the little fellow swallowed some greedily. Then Xaviera bathed his face and hands, and straightened the coarse mattress under him. The joy of a moment since, the exultant gayety, had left her, now that she was face to face with such evident misery.

"Isn't there any one to stay here with you, and to help you?" she asked Elizabeth.

"No, ma'am," answered the child. "But I won't fall asleep any more," she protested. "I just dozed off that time because Danny did. I tell him to stay in the house," she added, "but he won't. He always follows me, and that's how he got run over to-day."

"My dear, my dear," said Xaviera, in quick pity, "how do you live? Where are your people?"

"We haven't any—'cepting father—an' he never comes home, only when he drinks very bad."

"Have you had anything to eat to-day?" asked Xaviera.

The child hung her head.

"Yes, ma'am. Miss Decker, she gave me something this morning."

"And not since?"

"No, ma'am."

Xaviera pondered. They were hungry, then. And how was Danny to get well without nourishment?

"Wait," she said, hastily. "I am going to run up and get you some food. Don't go to sleep until I come."

That was the first consideration—present hunger. Aunt Magdalen had retired, but Aunt Winifred was nodding over her prayer-book when Xaviera entered.

"I have just found those two poor Bernard children starving," said Xaviera. "Won't you give me something for them? Danny was hurt to-day—his little leg was almost crushed. And their house is dreadful, dreadful! I have never seen anything like it! Haven't the people in Segrovia any feeling, to let two children suffer so?"

Winifred got up and put some food together in a small basket, sketching, as she did so, the history of the two Bernard children. People would have been glad to do for them, but Elizabeth would not part with Danny. The father, too, was an annoying man in liquor, and no one cared to bother with the children on that account, being sure of sound abuse the moment he discovered it.

"And what is everybody's business is nobody's business," said Xaviera. "Still—"

Aunt Winifred looked at her keenly.

"It is not the helping of the Bernard children that makes you look so, Xaviera?" she asked. "You seem happy, young—"

"If you had encountered a great danger, a very great danger, that you had been afraid to face, and found that you could laugh at it, wouldn't you be happy, too? That is what is the matter with me, Aunt Winifred!" And then under her breath, "I climbed the way that led beyond, and found my cross—and lo! in coming back again God took my cross from me!"

Aunt Winifred bent over her, kissing her.

"Try to be happy with us, Xaviera," she said. "And don't mind if Magdalen is queer and harsh. She has had much sorrow. Your father— She thinks—"

"It will come all right in the end," said Xaviera. "She will see that I never mean to leave either one of you again." And then, brightly, "You, Aunt Winifred? Why, I could never leave you, now, Aunt Winifred!"

CHAPTER IX.

THROUGH THE STORM.

THE summer was starting, and the influx of visitors to Segrovia commencing. The little town seemed to awaken from its winter's sleep, emerging gaily into the growing warmth of the sun—for the summer was its harvest-time. Xaviera's duties had steadily increased, and now every day seemed to enlarge her usefulness. Father Powers begged her to take charge of the music of the church, and this she had done, so that Sunday morning was a time of delight, not alone to the Catholics who drove in from various sections of the country, but to many of the non-Catholic residents. The Xaviera Pomeroy whose talents could neither be bought nor entreated gave freely of them to God. Gradually Father Powers knew the difference. His church in Segrovia was growing in prosperity. People became more alive to their sense of responsibility in regard to the pastor who had striven so long among them.

The father of the Bernard children had disappeared, and rumor said that he had been frozen to death in the mountains during the winter. There wasn't any sorrow over his loss; rather a sense of relief among those who had ever come in contact with him. Infinitely patient, Xaviera had taken both children under her protection—and this was difficult for her, since all her life long she had never had much to do with children, being rather anxious to avoid them, if anything. Perhaps their helplessness and dependence appealed to her in a way that tugged at the

strings of the pride in which she had wrapped her heart. She taught Elizabeth many things, and even started her in her first spelling-book. Then, when she discovered that the little girl was really apt, she managed it so that she went to school. Here Danny found it hard, for he was so young. Despite the doctor's fear for his life, he had fully recovered from the effects of his accident—and but one ambition filled the child; that was to please “the kind lady.” So that when Xaviera brought him a wonderful box of leaden soldiers and some gaily colored picture-books, and showed him how happy he could make himself while Elizabeth was at school, he never questioned her assertion. Toys were things so wonderful in his life that he needed little coaxing to give them his full attention.

The coming of the summer visitors meant also an increase of work for the Misses Pomeroy. Curiosity brought a good many. They were anxious to see the aristocratic young woman whom the Pomeroyes “employed”—their niece, they were told. But none of them believed it. And yet there was a tacit avoidance of the girl by the better element. The mystery surrounding her had not been cleared. To the surprise of the inhabitants, Mr. Frayer did not leave when the shooting was over. He rented a beautiful house adjoining the Waverlys, and settled in it. He was always at the Waverly place—and by and by people wondered which one of the Waverly girls could be the attraction. The Waverly girls themselves knew that he cared for neither, and only Xaviera Pomeroy could supply the missing thread to the quiet determination of the man. He was not a Catholic, but he rented a pew at St. Mary's, and attended Mass every Sunday—there was Mass every Sunday in Segrovia now, and often Vespers. He waited for her—receiving always and only that quiet bend of the head in

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acknowledgment of his salute. He never spoke to her beyond the barest greeting—and she avoided him. But his silent pertinacity weighed upon her soul. The old fear of him had disappeared, true—but the fear of that old fear lay heavy at her heart. Not even to Father Powers had she given her entire confidence. It was a pity that her pride, her reticence kept her from consulting him, for the priest was a man who could see clearly through many things, and his advice—even the very knowledge that he knew all, would have helped her over many a dark hour.

Dark hours there were.

In spite of the simple life she above all things desired to lead, that high-strung nature could not go on its way without moments of depression amounting almost to terror. The nights were the worst. Then the vague terrors at which she could laugh during the day came full upon her, torturing her. She lived again in long past scenes, heard again the voices of the dead, saw, perhaps, out of the gloom, her brother's kind face, smiling at her. Allied to this distressing part of her life was the knowledge that in all these months she had never won the favor of that Aunt Magdalen whom her father had bade her try to love and care for. She had never spoken, during all this time, a single kindly word. And it had become a passion with Xaviera to live down the distrust by which she was surrounded—so that, when she saw it here in her own home, something like despair assailed her. A few there were who believed in and loved her. Father Powers saw a storm-tossed soul, hungry for refuge. He often talked of her to Dr. Fawcett, who listened, but always silently, never commenting. Muriel Thornton loved her, with a love that was strangely sweet to the girl, and she returned the affection—her devotion at times surprising herself. Elizabeth and Danny loved her; and Aunt Winifred; Phyllis also.

Xaviera tried to be content. Her strong "I will" had gone forth, and she would conquer though it took her lifelong efforts. Phyllis had changed greatly—not alone to a belief in something higher than the self-love she had set upon a pedestal, but some new change was working in her, a change that Xaviera could not understand. And being so reserved herself, she forgot that it was well to try to penetrate the hidden sorrow of such a girl as Phyllis Gordon. Of late days her ill-humor and irritation had been remarkable. She was easily provoked and excited. Often during the twenty minutes she gave to her friend every day she sat without opening her lips.

One evening, however, she came rather late, and found Xaviera in her own room. They talked until it grew quite dark, and when Xaviera would have risen to light the lamp, Phyllis, sitting on the floor at her feet, restrained her.

"I have received news from New York," she said. "I want you to listen to it, but I can not tell it if you do not sit still—just like this, in the twilight."

"Bad news?" asked Xaviera.

Phyllis laughed—and when her friend heard that mocking laugh she bent quickly to look into her face.

"I—don't—know! Sylvia Gordon is—at last!—engaged to be married!"

"Yes?" asked Xaviera, again. She did not know what to expect, or what to surmise, from that queer tone.

"To Dick Ferris."

"Dick Ferris!" echoed Xaviera. She had never heard the name before. "Who is Dick Ferris?"

"Who is he? He was the cause of my being sent away from New York," said Phyllis. "Sylvia was always in love with him,

always—but they had to get rid of me first. And it took them seven months to accomplish it, with me out of the way!”

Xaviera understood. The girl’s heart had been aching all the time—there had been a lover at the bottom of it all, and Phyllis had never told; confident, perhaps, of his integrity and his truth, trusting to the future that would restore him to her. With a pang of pity Xaviera took the girl in her arms, and brought her beautiful head close to her bosom. Phyllis began to weep silently. After a while she sat up, dried her eyes, and struggled from Xaviera’s embrace.

“I told you right along that I did not believe in love—I might have known that such a man as Dick Ferris couldn’t stand the test,” she said. “And now I am done with it. I have made up my mind. Xaviera, what is there between you and Mr. Frayer?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing? There is nothing?”

“Absolutely nothing.”

“But he knew you—”

“And if he did, what of it?”

“Simply this: If there is nothing between you, I am going to prove to my Aunt Isabel that though she condemned me to a desert, she can not conquer me. I shall do better than either one of her cherished daughters!”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that I intend to marry Mr. Frayer—who is not Mr. Frayer at all, as you and I know well. I shall marry him—and that as soon as he realizes that you are not for him. He *must* realize that soon. One can’t have everything in this world. He is rich and he is titled, and she can have Dick Ferris, and he can have her.”

Xaviera's face paled.

"Child, what are you saying?"

"I shall, I tell you."

"He has asked—"

"Asked? No. But it is because he thinks he may yet win you—and I have been indifferent. Never mind."

"Oh, Phyllis, my poor child, do not talk so. For God's sake do not think of such a marriage. Lord Allison—"

"Lord Allison! You knew it, then, you knew it. Why wouldn't you trust me? Do not I trust you?"

"Yes, surely," said Xaviera, bitterly. "Surely, surely. You have trusted me just now with your tale of Dick Ferris. You knew that Mr. Frayer is an Englishman. He is not a bad man—but he can be very, very cruel. No, no, Phyllis. Better for you to die than to marry Allison Frayer."

Phyllis shrugged her shoulders.

"Xaviera, I have tried to reach up to the height on which you stand. It is useless—I can not."

"And Dr. Fawcett? What has he done that you can not like him? There you would be happy. He is honest and he is true, and he is fond of you, I know. Your heart, dear, is to be considered—your affections—"

"Leave them out of the question, Xaviera. I gave my heart all the chance it is going to get. It has played me false. I am in the game of life now for what good things it can bring me."

And this at eighteen! Xaviera was silent.

"Mr. Frayer gives a dance on the tenth," continued Phyllis, lightly. "I do not think seven months in Segrovia have deprived me of my charm. I shall wait until then to begin operations." She laughed under her breath—and Xaviera knew that the mock-

ing mood in which she had first made her acquaintance was full upon her. "He spoke particularly of you. You will come if he invites you for my sake? To show him that he had better take the good the gods provide?"

"I will never enter willingly or of my own volition into the room that holds Allison Frayer, or breathe the same air with him," said Xaviera. "I came to Segrovia to get away from him and his kind. I do not intend to seek that which above all things, I desire to avoid."

* * * * *

She kept her word. Neither persuasion nor entreaty could induce her to attend the affair given by Allison Frayer to his erstwhile townspeople. And during all that time Phyllis was brilliant as the butterfly to which she had been likened—and no one realized that the gayety was forced, and that underneath was heartache—none but Xaviera.

The evening of the tenth of June was wet and stormy—but weather mattered little. At the last moment Aunt Mary could not go, and asked the Waverlys to call for Phyllis, which they did gladly.

Sitting alone before the fire in the solitary drawing-room, Aunt Mary knew that the weirdness of the storm was taking possession of her. She felt oppressed and dreary, half wishing that she had gone with Phyllis, and again wishing that Phyllis had stayed at home. At last, calling Fanny, she bade her wrap up warmly and step over to the Pomeroy's, to ask Miss Xaviera if she would mind coming to her for the evening. The shrieking of the wind about the gables of the house made the loneliness unbearable. This was what she told the girl when she came in obedience to her message.

"It had to happen that that dance must come off the very evening that I am laid up with this wretched rheumatism," she said, when Xaviera entered. "You will not consider that I am imposing on you, Miss Pomeroy?"

"No," said Xaviera, gently. "It is not an imposition at all. My aunts, as you perhaps are aware, retire early—and I am always up until eleven anyhow, if not later—reading or writing in my own room. This is a bad night to be alone. I think I am rather glad you sent for me."

She stood before the old lady, and the cross upon her bosom seemed to take on a thousand hues in the dancing firelight. Aunt Mary looked at her with pleasure in her glance. Of strong determination herself, she thoroughly appreciated the calm resolve of that pale face which masked the soul of iron; the poise of that striking dark head, so confident of power.

"We will have a little talk, then," she said. "Make yourself comfortable—draw your chair over here. Perhaps you would like to read? Do so, and I shall be as quiet as a mouse. I do not want to converse—but the presence of some one seems necessary. I must be getting old."

"Phyllis is so bright, so gay—she fills a house with herself," said Xaviera. "You feel the contrast when she is not here. As for reading—I do not care to, unless you would like me to read aloud to you."

"I went to your church last Sunday," said Mrs. Browne, irrelevantly. "Your minister is a fine man, isn't he? I liked his sermon and I liked your singing. Miss Pomeroy, there is something about your voice that touched me for the first time in years. Do you know it is a perfect one?"

"Thank you," said Xaviera. "My father saw that it was well

trained. But I do not sing much—I do not care to sing. I have no heart for music—except when I go there.”

“Why there?” asked Aunt Mary.

“Because there I am, as you know we Catholics believe, in God’s presence.”

“Oh, is that it? All churches are God’s houses.”

“But all churches do not possess God.” *Xaviera* smiled.

“Our little church does.”

Mrs. Browne leaned forward.

“Do you think that if such a thing were possible—that God Himself were really present—He could stay in that poor, humble, little church of yours? Think of the mightiness of a God—and the poverty of such a dwelling-place.”

Xaviera caught her breath.

“God took humbler dwelling-place than that wooden church, *Mrs. Browne*,” she said. “He took our human body, and our human form of speech, and our human weakness. If He could stoop to that— Well, who can question God’s humility?”

Aunt Mary sat back in her chair.

“I am going all the time now. But I should like to understand the service. It is so queer to me. And it seems so important—as if your minister were accomplishing something. Please explain it to me, so that I shall not be altogether lost the next time.”

And then *Xaviera*, simplifying her language as much as possible, began to explain the sacrifice of the Mass. She had a tender love for the Blessed Sacrament, and the great mystery lost nothing that earthly words could give in her description of it. Question after question came from Aunt Mary’s lips, and question after question *Xaviera* answered.

Suddenly the bell rang, startling them both.

"Oh," cried Mrs. Browne. "Who can that be? Some one for you, probably. Your aunts have become alarmed at your absence—it is actually half past ten now."

"I told Aunt Winifred where I was going—and that I might not return until late," said Xaviera, quietly. "Sit still—I will answer the bell."

"It can not be Phyllis—it is entirely too early," said Aunt Mary. Xaviera had risen. "Do not open the door until you are sure. One can not be too careful. Burglars—"

Xaviera went out into the hall.

"Who is it?" she called, softly, remembering the warning.

"It is I, Miss Pomeroy. Open, please."

It was Edgar Fawcett's voice. She threw the door open at once, and the wind, finding entrance, came in gustily, blowing out the flickering light, so that they stood in darkness. The rain beat on Xaviera's face as she tried to bring the door to. Her fingers were trembling. "It is you, Miss Pomeroy? I am not deceived? You spoke to me?"

The words seemed to choke him. He was breathing heavily. His eyes straining through the darkness, fastened hungrily on the spot of light on Xaviera's bosom—where the cross lay. And then his hand touched her dress, her sleeve, even her hair, roughly, as if he would assure himself that it was she.

"It is I, doctor," said Xaviera. "You are back very early. Surely nothing has happened? Phyllis—"

"Where were you?" he burst forth. "Twenty minutes ago where were you? On the hill road from Frayer's? Speak, girl, speak!" His voice was shaking, his grasp harsh.

Xaviera grew cold with nervousness as he seized her wrist and held it.

"I—don't know," she began, vaguely. "I—"

"What right have I to ask? None. But I insist on a reply. Were you out? Answer me, yes or no?"

"I beg of you—"

He laughed. The fingers that held her wrist tightened—the other hand sought her arm. He almost dragged her to the doorstep. The rain beat down upon her head and face. With a cry of indignation she struggled to release herself. In vain.

"There is light here—I can see you," he said, harshly. "Do not try to reason with me. You were not—no, it was not you! What a fool I am, what a fool! Tell me, tell me—have I seen you on the hill road about a half hour ago? Will you speak? Deny it!"

"I have been here almost three hours," said Xaviera. Her strength gave out and she would have fallen had she not leaned against the doorpost. "I beg of you to release me," she said, wearily.

"How did you get here?"

"Fanny came for me." His impetuosity robbed her of all resistance.

"Frayer! Have you not seen Frayer, then?"

"You are going too far," warned Xaviera. "For a stranger you have gone much too far."

"Oh, forgive me. I was mad. I thought—I do not know what I thought. I will explain. But not now, Xaviera, not now." The strong man was greatly shaken.

"Where are you, Miss Pomeroy?" called Aunt Mary, from the open doorway. "The floor is soaking with the rain," she went on, complainingly. "The place will be ruined. What folly! Are

you mad to stand bareheaded in such a torrent? Who is that with you? Dr. Fawcett? Why— Did you come for Xaviera?"

"Yes," said the doctor. "I came for her. I wish I were able to take her away with me." There was a strange quiver in his voice—but Xaviera heard nothing. "I am a barbarian—a brute!" he went on, passionately. "Forgive me, Xaviera, forgive me, but I could not— Oh, you will think me mad, I know, unless I tell you all." He released her, then paused until he saw that she was safely inside, and then walked quickly from them down the rain-swept street. Xaviera, shaken and trembling, closed the door behind her.

"What is it?" asked Aunt Mary. "In the name of all things wonderful, what is the matter with the man?"

"If I only knew," said Xaviera.

"Could he have been drinking?" surmised Aunt Mary. "But no—he never touches anything of that description. He was in evening dress. He must have come straight from Mr. Frayer's."

"Probably," said Xaviera.

"The idea of coming through such a storm—and on foot," and then Mrs. Browne began to laugh. "It is jealousy, probably. He is afraid of Mr. Frayer's attentions to Phyllis!"

"That must be it," said Xaviera. She was shivering with the cold. Her hair was wet from the rain, and her shoulders. She stooped down to the fire, holding her hands to the blaze; hoping that Aunt Mary's keen eyes might not read the expression on her face.

CHAPTER X.

IN CONFIDENCE.

XAVIERA spent the next day in sore perplexity. She could not understand the strange actions of the physician the night before, and there was no explanation proffered. Phyllis came shortly before she started out on the round of visits she paid every evening—first to the little church, to Mrs. Thornton's, and then to the Bernard children. After that, home to her beloved books. She did not know that these visits to Muriel Thornton were the stumbling-blocks between her and her Aunt Magdalen. Of all in the village she was the most ignorant concerning the past of her own people. She knew nothing of their history, or the events that had gone to round out their lives.

"Did you quarrel with Dr. Fawcett last evening?" began Xaviera, abruptly, as soon as the young girl entered.

"I?" Phyllis opened her eyes. "I? Why, no. Aunt Mary tells me he was to our house—you saw him?"

"Yes, I saw him. I thought he might have quarreled with you."

"Oh, no. He left about ten o'clock. Somebody sent for him, and he did not return."

"Did you have a pleasant time?"

"Oh!" Phyllis caught her breath. "It was glorious, wonderful! A fairyland! And I have found out all about Mr. Frayer, even though you wouldn't tell me, Xaviera. He is an English baronet—he told me so himself. He has four castles!" She

clapped her hands in ecstasy. "Four! What do you think of that?"

"His first wife found one enough to die in," said Xaviera, coldly. "Where did Mr. Frayer go when he left you at ten o'clock?"

"He was with me all evening. Ten o'clock? Yes—he did leave about that time—he had some arrangements to see to about the supper, he said."

Xaviera was silent. Something must have occurred to put the self-contained Dr. Fawcett into such a state of excitement. He had looked like a man suddenly distraught. Why, why, why? That "why" had tormented her all day. Was it because he was jealous of Phyllis? Perhaps he had missed her and Frayer, and in his excitement had confounded her with the girl. That must be it!

But this was so improbable that even long after Phyllis had gone, her mind twisted about the reasons he might have had. Her common sense told her that such a thing could not be—that no man in his senses could act in such a manner. Again and again the thought of it occurred to her—and she could find no explanation. She tried to pray, but her thoughts wandered; she went to the Bernard children first—but even their affectionate caresses and the joy with which they welcomed her could not take her mind from the unpleasant subject. When she entered Mrs. Thornton's she found the old lady seated before the crucifix. She glanced up eagerly—but Xaviera's face was tranquil, outwardly, and Muriel Thornton breathed more freely.

"You come at the right moment, as always," she said, in her friendly tones. "I am tired and weary and in need of comfort. I have not closed an eye all night."

"What is it, dear old mother?" asked Xaviera. "And can I help you?"

"Have you heard that Segrovia, to its ill or good fortune, has had a whole theatrical troupe descend upon it? That they intend to stay all this week just for one performance? I believe there is an English gentleman in the town who has been the means of bringing them."

"I have not heard," said Xaviera, indifferently. "It is possible, though. When did they come?"

"Last night—in all that storm. I have never told you, Xaviera, that my child—the only child I ever had, is still alive."

Xaviera looked at her quickly. The sadness in the old lady's voice went to her heart. With the tenderness she always felt when in the presence of this lonely woman, she went to her and put her hand on her shoulder.

"She was everything a mother's heart could desire," went on the plaintive voice. "But she would not stay with me. She was too bright, too beautiful to lead the quiet life I desired for her above all things. No—she would not stay with me, and I have not seen her in many years. But my constant prayers have been that before I die her erring feet may come back to the paths she has forsaken—" Her voice was choked with sobs. "I prayed that God would not let her die an unrepentant death. And yesterday—"

"What of yesterday?" asked Xaviera, tenderly. "Tell me—what of yesterday?"

"I saw her. She is here with those actors and actresses who have come from God knows where, and who will go out again into the world. Did no thought of her mother cross her mind? Surely, surely, it must have been a longing to see me that brought her once

more to Segrovia? She knows I am here—for to-day I sat waiting, waiting, waiting. It seemed so long. And she passed the house, Xaviera—passed it in her carriage, laughing as she rode by. And I, sitting at the window, would have gone out to her, called after her, but that my trembling limbs refused to bear my weight. I could not move—I was stunned. My dear, my dear, my heart is breaking. If God had not let me live to see this day!”

“Ah!” said Xaviera, pitifully. “She must come to you—she must see you. Surely a girl must love her mother. I will go, I will tell her about you—yes, I will bring her to you.”

But Muriel Thornton drew back, shuddering.

“Not you,” she said, “not you.”

“Why not?” urged Xaviera. “I would speak kindly—”

“Remember the precarious position you occupy,” said Muriel Thornton, with energy. “You dare not visit any of those people—Segrovians are but human, and it will set tongues wagging again. No, Xaviera—if needs must I shall go myself. But I can scarcely believe that she will not feel my great love for her—that she will not understand and come—”

There was a sudden scream, a call for help from the road outside. Xaviera started to her feet, listening. Again the cry came, and this time she recognized Elizabeth’s voice. She waited no longer, but with rapid steps passed out into the hall, throwing the door wide. The poor child, knowing that Xaviera had left for Mrs. Thornton’s, had run in that direction; but her strength gave out at the very gate, and she had fallen to the ground. Before Xaviera could reach her, the man who had been pursuing her bent over and dragged her up brutally. With an exclamation, Xaviera thrust herself hurriedly forward, holding out one arm to intercept the heavy blow that would have descended on the child’s head.

"It is father!" panted Elizabeth, in frantic fear. "It is father. He has broken all our pretty things! He has spoiled our lace curtain! He has torn the bed apart! Everything is gone, everything—and now we're all poor again, Miss Pomeroy, now we are poor again!"

A torrent of oaths welled from the man's lips. He made another lunge forward to strike the child, but Mrs. Thornton had followed Xaviera to the gate, and now, with kindly hands, led Elizabeth away from the frail protection of her friend's skirts—to which she clung desperately.

"I am afraid," sobbed Elizabeth. "I am afraid. He will hurt her—he will hurt Miss Pomeroy."

Xaviera, meanwhile, kept her eyes fastened on the drunkard, and her steady gaze cowed him.

"So you would strike a child!" said Xaviera. "A poor, delicate little child! And you call yourself a man?"

"Oh! You are the young lady who is teaching them to rise above their station?" he said, sneeringly. "I have heard of you—and I will thank you kindly, ma'am, to attend to your own affairs and let me attend to mine. Them's my children—"

She did not deign to answer him. The gate stood open, and with stately step she came out and closed it behind her, hoping that by this action he might forget that Elizabeth was sheltered within. He followed, indeed, her silence emboldening him. If he had heard the petty scandal of the town, he remembered it now, and added to it, for he sent a volley of abuse after her that sickened her. She stood still, listening, and her soul revolted. What a fool she was! Why had she come here—to brave this thing, among these miserable, small-minded—

"You would teach my children to be like yourself," screamed

the rasping voice. "But not while I have anything to do with them. It is well for you, with such people as you come from, to cross the paths of those who are respectable and dictate to them. Your mother—"

Some one sent him reeling against the roadside then, so forcibly that he stumbled and fell. But Xaviera did not heed. The newcomer bent over the prostrate figure, saying a few words to him in a low voice. But Xaviera did not hear. She stood like one carved in stone. Her mother! Who was her mother? The question rose with new force to annoy her. What meant these insinuations, these taunts? Who was her mother? She thought of Magdalen Pomeroy's face when she had uttered her mother's name. She smiled a little. Surely that was Dr. Fawcett. Witness to all her humiliations, why not this? He came up to her.

"I thought he had come this way—Danny told me he had tried to beat Elizabeth," he said. "And I followed. That settles it. To-morrow I shall see that he is put where he can do no further harm, and the children taken from under his control for ever."

She was not listening.

"Tell me," she breathed. "You know? My mother—I can bear it if some one will only tell me—some one who will be sorry—"

Her voice died away. His grave eyes rested on her face.

"And I have added to your burden," he said, with infinite regret in his tones. "Let me help you."

"I need no help," she said. "I only want—to know."

"Ah!" bitterly. "That is true. You need no one—no one but yourself. You are sufficient to yourself alone."

"What does that matter?" she asked, impatiently. "The only thing now is what you can tell me. My mother—"

"Miss Pomeroy, can I, or you, or any one, account for the vagaries of a drink-maddened brain? Who was your mother? I never saw her in my life. And you yourself know more of her than I do. Because the fellow uttered the first vile thoughts that came to him, must you believe them, or ask the reason why?"

Xaviera threw her head back, hastily, proudly.

"You are right. He caught me in an unguarded moment. These last few hours have been hard upon me. I thank you."

"Will you trust me?" he began, earnestly. "I can not explain my conduct of last evening. I may have to, but I am hoping against hope that I will not have to. Not for my sake, but for yours. Ah, I wonder why I distrust your strength! I seem to see so much more clearly than you—I understand things more fully. There is danger to your peace of mind in Segrovia. Would it not be better to leave now—if only for a few weeks? There are other places besides this—where prejudice will be less hard to overcome—"

She stared at him, frowning.

"I am battling against this prejudice in the dark—and because of that very thing I shall fight it out to the bitter end," she said, with sparkling eyes. "I need no one."

"No one?"

"No one—save Him whom I possess in all His fulness—God! I have not taken this step without due consideration. I am here—and here I mean to stay. Something in my heart tells me that I am sent for some great purpose. Shall I shirk this since I find it ready at my hand, waiting only for the veil to be withdrawn? Never."

"And how long can you stand it?" he burst forth, passionately. "Do you not think that I can see how the net is drawing

about you, closer, closer, closer, every day? Was it for love of Segrovia that Allison Frayer rented the Gables? He comes for you, Xaviera, from the life you know, and the way that leads beyond. He returns to it, with you."

"With me?" she laughed harshly. "Yes. If a woman's dead body is worth anything to a man, then will he return—with me."

"You loved him once." His voice challenged her.

"I did," she acknowledged. "I loved him—once. But there was the ancient, miserable prejudice against my religion. He came from that Elizabethan stock who have persecuted Catholics when and where they found them, and who hold the strong antagonism of the ages under the outer polish of to-day. I was young, blind, infatuated. My father saw the danger—my brother warned me. I would not listen. Oh, no! Was I not a Catholic? And a Pomeroy? Were not these two things enough? For my father taught me to be proud of my own strength, and to rely on it.

"And then his mother died—his mother. And on her deathbed he promised her he would never marry one of my faith. Alas, for the love of Xaviera Pomeroy! For when he told me, young as I was, I could see the danger into which an earthly love could lead me—the danger of apostasy!

"He married another—thinking perhaps to forget the young artist who had nothing but her faith, and her talents, and her strong, strong will! But he could not! Even before the poor creature he had made his wife died out of very heartsickness, he, being Godless, persecuted me. He came to Frank—who was dying even then. He would not have lived—much longer—I know—But the end would not have come so soon—the threats of the man terrified him for the girl he must leave to fight the battle of life alone. Frank died that night in my arms. Before he died—"

She paused, trying to recover her breath, for she was trembling.

"He made me promise to go away—to leave the world altogether if I could find the vocation, or, barring that, to seek the shelter of my people—of those who belonged to me by blood. As soon as I could do so I managed it. I came—here. And when I met him—that first day— Even on my way here— Oh, it is dreadful, it is awful. No wonder the terror of it oppresses me. That night, long ago, you remember—the first night you saw me? He passed me, held my arm—looked into my face. And laughed. Oh, I was afraid, afraid, afraid—for I am only a woman after all!"

Into the man's face, as she spoke so rapidly, pouring forth her eager words, striving to justify herself, there came a strange light. She did not see it, nor would he, understanding her, dare to let her see it.

"That is just why it is so hard," said he, "because you are only a tender-hearted, sensitive woman after all. Child, you are passing through the worst phase of it now. Be strong as only you know how. Be brave. Listen to me. You have told Father Powers any of this?"

"Very little. I should not have told you—it is an evidence that I am growing weak." She drew back now, ashamed of the rush of emotion that had prompted her to say so much to him. "I am not given to making confidences—you forced this one on yourself."

"Thank God," he said, fervently. "For I am interested in you and in your struggle. Last night I thought that you had failed—last night I thought I saw you on the hill road, talking to Allison Frayer—with his arm about you. Xaviera, the sight was a dreadful one. It impelled me to seek you—to find you—and to

taunt you; nay, to beg of you to leave here rather than risk defeat—”

“No, no,” said Xaviera. “My brother bade me come—and I have said that I will stay. You have yet to learn, Dr. Fawcett, the power of my will.”

“I have already learned it,” said Dr. Fawcett, under his breath.
“I have already learned it.”

CHAPTER XI.

THE MESSAGE.

SHE was not sorry—not even when she thought it over. The bitterness no longer weighed upon her. Somehow, the knowledge that this honest man understood made her singularly happy. She wished that she had told it to him more completely, more in detail, so that he would realize every bit of it; so that he would feel her position still more keenly, since he was her friend. Her mind was occupied, too, with the Bernard children. After Dr. Fawcett's words to him, whatever they had been, the father disappeared again. But wreck and ruin were left Xaviera's little protégés, and Elizabeth's despair was absolute. Danny had been thrown into a fever by the man's drunken violence; luckily the girl escaped without serious injury, thanks to her friend's interference. She had little time to spare from her work that day, for all three sewed energetically until nightfall. Dr. Fawcett came in to give her news of the children in the morning. Some kind neighbors had tried to restore order, he said, but the poor little place was but the shadow of its former neatness.

Among the many visitors who came and went to and from the Pomeroy's there was talk of nothing but the actors whom Mr. Frayer had brought to play at the Gables—hiring them a week to give one night's performance. There was one among them who was a wonderful singer—Miss Pamela Danby; and Xaviera wondered how it fared with Muriel Thornton—and if she had gone

that day to see her daughter. That must be her first visit as soon as she could get away—perhaps Dr. Fawcett could manage to bring the much desired meeting about.

Phyllis had learned by this time that if she waited until dusk she had a better opportunity of seeing Xaviera alone, of conversing with her—and often her friend allowed her to walk with her to the places that Phyllis, laughingly, called her missions.

“What a delight!” said Phyllis, this evening, when, on entering, she saw the machines closed, noticed that supper was over, and that Xaviera had her hat on. “Now, you can come right out with me, and perhaps walk home—and *perhaps* talk good humor into Aunt Mary. Her rheumatism has made her so cranky that I can not stay in the house. Come up, like a charitable soul, and try to cheer her a little. Do you know, Xaviera, she is talking of you all the time? What did you say to her the other night?”

“We were talking about my religion, principally,” said Xaviera. “But I have other places to go, and unless you are willing to come with me, I am afraid— Who is that man, Phyllis? See how impudently he is staring at us.”

They were on the street now. Phyllis looked up to meet the glance of a pair of bold eyes—only by way of passing, however, for his interest centered in Xaviera. In fact, he stopped as she approached him, lifting his hat with a swagger air.

“I beg your pardon,” he said. “But you are Miss Pomeroy, are you not?”

“I am Miss Pomeroy,” she answered, haughtily.

“I thought I could not be mistaken. In London three years ago, I heard you and your brother at the Met—”

“Let us go, Phyllis,” said Xaviera, hastily. She grasped her

companion's arm and rushed her past, leaving the man staring after them.

"Well—she isn't on the road, that's sure," he said. "Wonder what Danby will say when I tell her Xaviera Pomeroy's here. Won't believe me, I'll bet. What a find! Xaviera Pomeroy!"

He chuckled to himself.

"You see," said Xaviera, "you can't get away from it, no matter how you try. Isn't it too bad!" She spoke in a vexed tone. "He thought he could claim comradeship with me, I suppose. He must be one of that strolling band Segrovia is talking about."

"It is no crime," said Phyllis, stoutly. "I do not see why you should let it disturb you. Just look ahead, Xaviera. Where are you taking me?"

"To the Bernards first—poor children. Phyllis, you could do so much good if you would only interest yourself—"

"I intend to," said Phyllis, softly. "Dear Xaviera, every day I have been thinking over what you have said to me—and the more I contrast your words with the outward polish of Mr. Frayer the more I realize how true you are to noble things. Xaviera, after knowing you, I can't be untrue to myself—I can't be. You have made a different being of me—and even though I give way to the speech I learned before I met you, my heart is changed. The same frivolities do not please me. I am looking below the surface—"

Xaviera, taking her hand, held it tenderly. No words were necessary.

"So," went on Phyllis, "I shall not try to make Mr. Frayer care for me—and maybe, after a while, if Dr. Fawcett— You would like it, if I married Dr. Fawcett, Xaviera?"

"Yes," said Xaviera, without hesitation. "There is a great difference, Phyllis. Allison Frayer is not a good man."

"I contrasted the two dispositions—taking your words as a guide," said Phyllis, calmly. "The Englishman is so faultless, his carriage so elegant, his manner so polished—without a flaw. On the contrary, the other fairly shouts at you if your actions do not please him—yet, he has an earnestness that Mr. Frayer lacks. You taught me to perceive this, Xaviera. Maybe, after a while, if the doctor really likes me as Aunt Mary says he does, I can begin to care, too."

She spoke wistfully. Xaviera was silent.

"How about Dick Ferris?" she ventured then.

"The spot is a sore one," said Phyllis, simply. "I do not want to talk of him."

"But you will tell Dr. Fawcett—in case—"

"Oh, Xaviera, no!"

"Oh, Phyllis, yes!"

"Xaviera, you don't understand men."

"And you do? A man worthy the name will love you the better because of your trust in him. Phyllis, you do not know that character. His hand is firm as steel, and his heart pure gold. He will make a good husband, but a better friend. And between friends there should be perfect, absolute, entire trust. Has he said anything to you?"

"No," said Phyllis, shrugging her shoulders, indifferently. "And I don't want him to. It is a sort of family arrangement, and he and Aunt Mary can settle it between them. Of course, now that I have decided—"

She spoke with such assurance, confident in the power that her beauty gave her—the key that had opened the door of many tri-

umphs for her before to-day. What a self-assured nature this was, thought Xaviera, smiling. Nothing seemed to shake it.

"This is the Bernard house; come in with me," said Xaviera.

Elizabeth sat mending the curtain for the window, trying to piece its strips together. Her eyes were swollen with weeping. She had endeavored to straighten things out as they had been, but it was a hopeless effort. When Xaviera entered, she threw the curtain from her and ran to meet her with a loud burst of tears. Danny, hearing Elizabeth, began to cry also, and for the next few moments Xaviera had all she could do to comfort them, listening to the poor little housewife's lamentations over the destruction of her treasures.

"Now, just wait a minute," she said. "If you cry any longer I won't be able to say a word—and I am sure you want to listen to me, don't you, dear? Hush, now, until we see what has really happened. The dishes are gone—well, there were only a few, and there are some pretty blue ones at Mason's—such pretty blue ones, with gold bands on them! The curtain! Put that up the way it is for to-night. We'll have a new one for to-morrow. And see," she went on, gently; "the picture of the Sacred Heart is untouched, dearie; and its light still burning. God has sent you a little cross to bear; it will come right in the end."

"But I'm afraid of papa," said Danny. "I'm awful afraid."

"He would not touch you, Danny—he loves Danny."

"But he will beat Elizabeth."

"Elizabeth can run away—he wouldn't touch Elizabeth, either, if the wicked thing they call drink didn't have possession of him," said Xaviera, with sorrowful heart. "And remember this much, if you don't pray and ask God to help him, he can't be good. Ask God to make your father good, Danny."

"Aren't the people in this place miserable!" burst forth Phyllis. "The idea of not doing something for these two poor little things. They should be sent to an institution. It is a shame—"

Xaviera looked at her and the words died on the girl's lips. She had been here eight months almost, and had never seen the interior of the children's home until to-day. She felt that there was a contrast between practice and preaching.

"I'm trying to find a home for them. If only Mrs. Thornton would take them in," sighed Xaviera. "She is old, though, and Danny might be troublesome. Things were going along nicely when that man had to turn up. Elizabeth is really so sensible. Of course I wouldn't talk of him in a depreciatory way before them for the world—but he should be put where he could do no further harm. Dr. Fawcett said something about it last night. He is apt to kill those children in a drunken frenzy. I shall never forget last evening—the poor little thing lying on the road and that great big man sodden with drink, his heavy hand raised to strike. I've got the mark of his blow on my arm."

"Oh, Xaviera!"

They were nearing Muriel Thornton's. Phyllis turned her shocked face toward her companion.

"Yes, I barely managed to save her. Here is Mrs. Thornton's. I shall not be an instant—and you had better remain outside. She is old and alone, and might not care to see a stranger."

"Do not mind me," said Phyllis.

The old woman turned her patient face as Xaviera entered.

"She has not come yet?" asked the girl, brightly.

"Not yet." Muriel Thornton shook her head.

"I have heard that Dr. Fawcett was called to attend one of

the company who was ill. Supposing I tell him of it—perhaps he can persuade her. What is her name—her stage name?”

“I—don’t know,” said Mrs. Thornton, hesitatingly. “Perhaps she has a different name now. But he can not mistake her. She is beautiful and fair—and tall, like you, Xaviera. She is very beautiful—tell Dr. Fawcett that. You—you will not go? Promise me you will not go?” she said, anxiously.

Xaviera kissed her.

“How careful you are of me! No, I do not intend to go, if that assurance will comfort you. And now there is some one waiting for me, or I would stay longer with you. I’ll make up for it to-morrow.”

She was thinking even then that Mrs. Thornton looked much shaken. Her face was ghastly in the lamplight. Xaviera felt that unless the daughter came, and came soon, the mother’s breaking heart would not stand the strain.

* * * * *

When they reached the Honorable Mrs. Browne’s they found a number of visitors, including, much to Xaviera’s delight, Dr. Fawcett himself. She got no chance to talk to him alone, and she had not been in the room more than ten minutes when, to her astonishment and dismay, Allison Frayer was announced. He, in turn, could scarcely believe his eyes when they rested on Xaviera Pomeroy.

“I called to find out how Miss Phyllis felt after her dissipation of two nights ago,” he said, “and to arrange for another pleasurable evening. I see that you possess a charm which I can not discover, Mrs. Browne, hard as I strive. How do you manage to add Miss Pomeroy to your charming little circle?”

Mrs. Browne flushed with pleasure.

"The charm lies in the mere fact that I like to come," interjected Xaviera, before Aunt Mary could speak.

"The inference is plain," he said, rather stiffly, for all ears were intent on the play of words. "Yet the Gables is not such an uninteresting place to visit, as Miss Phyllis will surely testify." He turned to Phyllis' aunt with an agreeable smile. "This time I am sure not even Miss Pomeroy can refuse me. Miss Danby, who possesses a rare contralto voice, and who has sung in many well-known theaters, has been kind enough to place her services at my disposal for to-morrow. Surely Miss Pomeroy, who so loves music, and who is so discriminating a critic, can not wish to let such an opportunity slip? Perhaps I might even ask," his eyes were on the girl's averted face now: "I might even ask you to favor us—just once— I have a splendid violin—one which your brother called a magnificent instrument— It may be the last request I shall care to make in Segrovia. I return to England shortly."

The girl scarcely heard. Her face was cold; her eyes, filled with aversion, met Dr. Fawcett's. Something in his expression interested her. What message was he trying to convey? The current of her thoughts changed suddenly. Was he not her friend? She knew, looking at him, that he wanted her to accept this invitation. And then she caught Mr. Frayer's closing words: "I return to England."

She had not thought what joy such an announcement would give her.

"You—you want me to hear Miss Danby?" she asked. "And you said— You have a violin? That is it?"

"If you would be so kind—"

"I think I mentioned that I never intended playing in public."

"In public? Miss Pomeroy, surely such a little home gathering—"

"I have given up music as a profession."

"You never professed to play violin. But I have heard you. And before I leave America I would like to hear Xaviera Pomeroy once more—just once. It may be for the last time."

There was a lurking triumph in his voice that she could not understand, but she read, as plainly as if he had finished the sentence: "It may be for the last time I shall hear you—as Xaviera Pomeroy." She was strangely troubled.

"Well, I will go," she said, almost ungraciously, and as if to end the discussion. "I will go to hear Miss Danby sing, since you are so kind. But to play—well, I can not promise. That depends upon my mood."

His eyes lighted up. Had she conferred a most wonderful favor there could have been no greater pleasure depicted on his face. Phyllis clapped her hands.

"Oh, now you will see fairyland!" she cried out with the rapture of a child. "Real, true fairyland, Xaviera."

But Xaviera rose and turned away, much annoyed at herself. Dr. Fawcett, the next moment, stood beside her.

"See how I trusted you," said the girl, in a low voice. "You wish me to go? You, who yesterday distrusted me? You ask me to deliberately put myself into the jaws of the lion! Why?"

"I am proud of your strength—and if I distrust anything it is endurance of the pain you may have to suffer," he returned. And then he added, enigmatically: "You may save a soul by the going, and bring joy to an aching heart. Pamela Danby is Muriel Thornton's daughter."

"You know that, too?" She started involuntarily. "You

know everything. Poor Mrs. Thornton! I meant to tell you to see her—to ask—”

“I learned the fact to-day by merest accident. And I have seen—asked—begged. All useless,” he said. He gazed at her with troubled eyes. “I appreciate Mrs. Thornton’s sorrow, while I am anxious to avoid danger—yet my plans may fail, and I be the means of thrusting you into the very misery I am striving to keep from you. I want Pamela Danby to meet you, Xaviera Pomeroy. To-morrow is your only opportunity. You will see her then, face to face. You will be strong for your own sake as well as hers?”

His earnestness compelled her to respond to that mood of his, despite its strangeness.

“And you will be there, my friend?” she asked, with winning softness.

“I will be there, my friend,” he answered.

* * * * *

For the following evening she put aside the gloomy garb of black, and robed herself in a pretty white silk, fashionable and frivolous enough to excite even Phyllis’ rapture. As usual her only ornament was the diamond cross that seemed by now to have become part of her. She and Phyllis went together, Aunt Mary acting as chaperon for both.

Together, then, the three entered the long drawing-room of the Gables, and Xaviera caught her breath involuntarily. Artistic of temperament, with a love for all that was beautiful, she had not thought that the things of the world could still allure her. She feasted her long-starved eyes on the luxury that had been hers in that circle from which she came, and which she had tried to retain in part by furnishing her own room as she had always had it. The

lights, the flowers, the perfume, the music, the well-dressed, courteous men and smiling women seeming one with it all—the rippling conversation—the laughter—

Xaviera's heart rose to her throat. This was the life she had left—this, this! For what? For the plain four walls of a humble cottage, for daily toil, for constant care, for heartbreak, for the tongues of those who dared revile and criticise. This was what she had left; and this was what was offered her. Luxury and ease lying at her feet, and honor and wealth!

Oh, for the things of the world, the beautiful things that she might secure by putting forth her hand!

Of all the temptations that Dr. Fawcett had counted upon, he, with his man's broader, one might say, cruder, soul, had not reckoned upon this. He had not a woman's longing after the refinements and delicacy which, once used to, it hurts her to be deprived of.

"Stay with me," she said to Phyllis, in a hoarse voice. "Stay with me—sit with me. The room is so bright it makes my head ache. I am dizzy." And then in an undertone: "This is the test."

And they sat one beside the other, Phyllis conversing brilliantly, calling Xaviera's attention to this or that, and Xaviera glad of the ceaseless chatter that gave her time to recover herself. Slowly but surely she did recover herself. Could *wealth* tempt her? Wealth, luxury—tempt Xaviera Pomeroy?

The man who would have given her all this stood at a distance and watched. That pale face told nothing of the conflict in her mind—those lips were sternly set, and the delicate hands rested quietly on her lap, without a tremor. The admiration in his eyes grew greater as he gazed upon her. And when presently Phyllis

rose in answer to the insistent beckoning of her aunt, he, who had been waiting with much impatience for this, advanced instantly and took the seat beside her.

"My white swan!" he murmured.

She made a motion as though to spring up—then, suddenly recollecting herself, sank back languidly again, the picture of self-possession.

"Please do not draw the attention of the others," she said, in a low voice. "Speak to me as you would to any stranger who visits your house for the first time—or I shall be forced to make—a very—early departure."

"If only you were a stranger to me," he said. "But memory is too keen. I can not forget so easily. And you—you are so cold. If I thought, for one instant, that you loved another, that you cared for any one else—

"No, not even then would I give you up, not even then. But to see these hands, so lovely and so beloved, without a gem upon them! You remember how you admired the pretty things? To see the sparkling, gay girl I knew, so icy-cold, so unfeeling, and so pitifully alone! You, who had friends by legion, suitors by the score! It maddens me—your very friendlessness appeals to me. Admit my manliness in that, *Xaviera*."

"Oh, I admit it," she said, carelessly. "I admit it—but it is uncalled-for. Your words bring up old-time vanities which I—" she fingered the cross upon her breast and smiled—"which I am glad to have put away from me. It was not to have your pity that I came—but to see—fairylan!" She let her eyes roam about the room carelessly, from one end of it to the other, and then, resting her chin on one upturned palm, met his glance full. "My fairylan has naught that glitters so sumptuously as

yours. And yet—I am happy. Happier in my loneliness than you with all your wealth.”

“Oh, yes,” he breathed, quickly. It was so wonderful that she was not repellent, that she looked at him almost kindly. “The wilderness were paradise enow!”

She shrugged her shoulders. Then silence and coldness wrapped her as in a veil as she sat beside this man who would have given every hope and ambition of his life for sake of her whom once he had forgotten. And into the way that led beyond that narrow existence of hers she would not go. Not a nerve in her body quivered. She was not sorry for him. If he felt pain, she thought—for she was not tender, save in rare cases—that it was the judgment of a righteous God, for he had given pain. Not to her alone—that much she could forgive him—but to her who had taken her place beside him because she loved him, borne his name, was the mother of his child—and who was dead.

“Would it not be worth while to any woman to make a man feel that he was the better for knowing—for loving her?” he went on, in a changed voice.

“A man, whether he wins a woman or not, is always the better for loving her—if he is the right sort of man,” she returned. “But you—are not the right sort of man.”

“That is sarcasm.”

She smiled.

“You are growing dense if you call truth sarcasm.”

“And that is contempt.”

“Always,” she said, with that amused curve to her lips. “Rest assured that if you have nothing else you have my unbounded contempt. You try to tell me of your devotion, not knowing that every word you say condemns you. Does it place you higher in

my esteem when you declare that you neglected your wife and child because you could not efface my image from your heart?" She laughed. "Rather does it lower you. Why can not men—some men—believe that women know their own minds?"

A queenly figure standing in the doorway arrested the words—a woman tall and graceful and superbly gowned, whose magnetic eye swept the guests assembled there with the proud confidence of one who knows her ground and is sure of her position. Xaviera's lips parted, her heart seemed to suddenly stop beating. Who was this, who was this? She leaned forward, and the sparkling cross upon her breast caught the light and attracted the stranger's attention. Her eyes met those of the girl—looked, lingered, flashed. It was over in a second. Xaviera turned her head away, for Mr. Waverly, advancing, had spoken to the beautiful woman, and she smiled. The evil triumph she had read in Frayer's face the night before was on it now.

"Do not let the entrance of Miss Danby—"

Another voice interrupted this sentence. Xaviera had not heard Dr. Fawcett approach, but now he stood before her:

"Miss Pomeroy, you mean to play this evening?" he asked.

A flush of pleasure greeted the words. Xaviera looked up eagerly.

"Just a moment, doctor," said Mr. Frayer. "If you please. Miss Xaviera is answering an important question—"

"A thousand pardons!" said the physician, hastily.

"I beg of you!" said Xaviera, protestingly. "I can not remember that Mr. Frayer has asked me any question—"

"It is a long-standing one," said Frayer, in a white heat of rage.

"Oh, the old one?" Dr. Fawcett would not like to hear

Xaviera speak to him in that drawling, insolent tone. He was sorry for Frayer. "I wish— You annoy me!"

"I may take measures—"

"Life is short at best—and I have lived a long, long time," said Xaviera Pomeroy, lifting her proud head. "I am not afraid."

She turned then and walked across the floor beside Dr. Fawcett.

"A battle royal," she declared, almost gaily. "Was that—is that—beautiful woman Muriel Thornton's daughter?"

"What is your impression?" asked Dr. Fawcett.

"I do not like her," said Xaviera. "She is the sort of woman I would be—if Frank had not saved me from it. She is that most pitiable of creatures—a woman without a conscience."

A shiver went through his frame.

"What makes you say a thing like that?" he said, angrily. "You could never be like her, Xaviera, never. And her conscience still exists. Conscience is a gift one always possesses. Hers is asleep. I want you to wake it."

"You want me to ask her to come to see her mother? The contrast is so terrible, Dr. Fawcett. That old woman, so patient, so humble. And this! It seems impossible."

"Yet it is not impossible," said Dr. Fawcett. "I would not want you even to meet her—only that I know you must become acquainted. Nor do I want you to say one word about Mrs. Thornton—"

"But—" began Xaviera, in amazement.

"I can rely on your music. She knows where her mother is—she knows what that mother's anxiety is. What could words say to her? Nothing. But there is a way, Xaviera. What message would you convey to a soul asleep in sin? Your eye kindles. Only you can touch that woman's heart by your playing—your playing,

and no one else's! You need not be observed—Frayer has arranged it so that the violin accompaniment is to be heard from behind that screen—”

“Since you wish it—”

They were at the end of the room. Frayer, with Pamela Danby at his side, barred their way.

“Miss Danby, Miss Pomeroy, Dr. Fawcett,” he said briefly.

He had recovered his composure.

“You are *the* Miss Pomeroy? Your brother was the violinist?” asked Miss Danby.

“Yes,” said Xaviera. She had no words for this woman. She was afraid of her.

“I feel myself flattered,” said Miss Danby. “And you are to play this evening, I believe? It is almost time, Mr. Frayer.”

“When you are ready,” he said, with a slight bow.

“Have it over with,” she replied, carelessly. And then she laughed. “I understand that Miss Pomeroy—*the* Miss Pomeroy—shrinks from public gaze?”

There was no answer even to this. She took her place, turning over the sheets of music carelessly in her fingers. Phyllis came flying up, and Xaviera stepped behind the screen, her limbs trembling.

“Those eyes, those eyes!” she said. “Those eyes of hers! They unnerve me. Where, where, *where* have I seen those eyes and heard that laugh before?”

Dr. Fawcett drew the violin from its case, and placed it in her hands. She held it, almost unconsciously.

“Xaviera Pomeroy, where is your will?” she asked herself, proudly. She raised her head, meeting that earnest, tender gaze bent upon her.

"I can not," she said, her lips moving, piteously. "I can not."

"Show me—show *me* at least, that you can conquer this last obstacle. Xaviera, it is cruel, but conquer it. For the sake of a woman's sleeping soul—of a mother's aching heart—"

Phyllis looked from his face to her friend's in dumb astonishment.

"My hands are nerveless—my will is gone," she said.

There was an impatient buzzing. Phyllis glanced out from behind the screen. Miss Danby, frowning impatiently, stood tapping her foot, waiting for the introductory bars.

"She is waiting. Hurry, hurry, Xaviera. Every one is looking toward us. Play, Xaviera."

Dr. Fawcett took the bow and clasped her fingers about it.

"You know the piece—the 'Swan Song'—and after that," his voice grew suddenly hushed and solemn—"after that 'The Message!'"

"'The Message!'"

Xaviera fell back, her throat working.

"'The Message'? What do you know about 'The Message'? Oh!" she cried out, in a fit of grief and anger, "I will not play! What friend of mine do you pretend to be that you would have me fight against my tenderest feelings? For what? The amusement of others? I will not play!"

She raised the violin in her shaking hands as if to cast it from her. Dr. Fawcett caught it quickly, and grasping the bow, drew it across the strings. The buzzing ceased. Xaviera threw herself into a chair, and covered her face with her hands. He knew the song by heart, and he played it well. Through to the very end he played it, with the obligato between the stanzas. The applause for the beautiful song subsided, but the music did not cease. Like

the rushing of a brook it poured forth a rain of melody, and they listened. Childish weeping, joyous laughter, a little ripple like the faint thread of a plaintive human voice over all. A touching, beautiful melody, then—rising loud and clear as if in victory, but ever, ever that one low note of pain that no clash of triumph could subdue until the insistence died away altogether, and only the sadness was left.

His face had taken on a look of rapture, but Xaviera sat numb before him, her startled eyes upon him. And when he finished he turned to meet that glance. The applause for what the guests considered Xaviera Pomeroy's exquisite playing rose and fell. Neither heard it.

"You knew him, then," said the girl, in an awestruck voice. "You knew my brother! Oh, it was cruel not to have told me. You knew him?"

"He was my teacher for a little while—before I came to Segrovia," said Dr. Fawcett, simply. "Though of one age with me, he was my teacher."

She put her head down on the table again. Her whole form was shaking.

"You knew my brother," she repeated, over and over. "You knew him, knew him, knew him!" And then: "I wish you had told me, prepared me. It was not right to take me by surprise." A long sigh parted her lips. "I am sorry you did not tell me. You have hurt me bitterly."

CHAPTER XII.

NEW PLANS.

"It is impossible," said Mr. Waverly, in a surprised voice.

"It is wonderful," said Frayer. "But you shall see what you shall see. I am not speaking from hearsay, but from knowledge. I'll go over to-morrow and tell you the whole story."

"If it is true," said Waverly, "the girl knows nothing."

"Nothing as yet. It is but right she should."

"No," said Mr. Waverly, in a warm tone. "Miss Pomeroy has not been over-friendly toward me, but Constance tells me many things that have prepossessed me in her favor. I believe in her, Frayer—I do, honestly. She is trying to get away from people in general. Let her alone. Such a story as that can do no good and may perhaps spoil her life here."

"Why should we care?" asked Frayer, for the sting of Xaviera's last words burned within him. "And Dr. Fawcett? Will it not mean much to our friend, the doctor?"

For Dr. Fawcett hovered about Xaviera with insistent attention the rest of that evening. He and Phyllis strove to be with her always, for the music had unnerved her more than even she would have liked to confess. Dr. Fawcett's face betrayed great disappointment—and his glance wandered more than once to the laughing countenance of Pamela Danby, who, seated in the center of the room, held court of her own. He was glad that Xaviera felt *distracted* and nervous—glad of it. She could not be drawn

into the proximity of that woman, who, as if by accident, let her eyes rest on the girl with more than interest in their depths—a scrutiny, a question, rather.

Once the physician intercepted this glance—and a daring hope rose in his mind. His message to her might not have failed after all if she thought *Xaviera Pomeroy* had played it. Surely she would not betray herself before these people? His fears made a coward of him. He desired to reach that calloused heart, but he desired above all others to guard the girl whom he had grown to esteem so highly. He had insisted that neither she nor *Phyllis* should mention who the musician had been, and both promised to evade the question. The eccentric Aunt Mary's eyes were filled with tears as she held *Xaviera's* hands and looked searchingly into her face.

"It seemed to me as if it were a message to the dead," she murmured. "*Xaviera*, what does it mean?"

"Tell me what it meant to you," said *Xaviera*, gently, as she sat down beside her. "That was my brother Frank's very own—the one thing out of many that I loved the best. It is so sad, so sad—I used to complain of its sad ending. 'Some day I will finish it, *Xaviera*,' he would say. 'Some day I will finish it triumphantly.'"

She could not guard herself any more to-night—her pride was gone, and her reserve, and her coldness. Her lips were trembling and her fingers fluttered nervously in Aunt Mary's clasp.

"I realize your loss—now," said Aunt Mary. "I am a hard-hearted, toughened creature, *Xaviera*. There is nothing can touch me—I am selfish and egotistic. But when I heard that—Girl, I have missed many things out of my life. I shall miss them no longer. Did you not hear the little children singing—feel the

tenderness of boy and girl love—and then the premonition of separation? The cry of dissent, rising supremely, loudly, victoriously over all—giving way at the last to the one insistent message: ‘Return, return, return!’”

Xaviera looked at the woman’s sharp, thin features, and wondered. She became conscious of a great humility—a greater compunction. How lightly she had judged her—how lightly passed her by! And yet under this unlovely exterior there was an artist’s soul!

“And I shall return,” said Aunt Mary, suddenly. “You know what I mean, Xaviera? I have wandered into paths far from the true refuge. The other night when you came to me through the storm you brought my perplexed soul relief. I felt at peace with myself—at rest. I shall return, Xaviera, for, after all, as you say, it will be but a returning.”

Xaviera understood then. It was as well. If Frank’s music could say such things to this woman, surely that other woman could not control the longings of her heart! Her troubled gaze sought the beautiful face—the beautiful eyes were looking at her without a single expression save that of laughter in them. A sigh passed Xaviera’s lips. Oh, the poor, patient soul, waiting, longing, praying—

“Mrs. Browne says that the violin music was a message,” she said, raising that troubled gaze to Dr. Fawcett’s face. “A message,” she repeated, dreamily.

“Ah!” he said, sadly. “It was a message. But the hand that evoked it must have lost its cunning. She knows it as well as you or I—”

“She? Miss Danby? Has heard—”

“You forget. Frank Pomeroy—there, I did not mean to

wound you by mentioning that name. She must have heard that played by him, since she knows you both. Were there no memories to be aroused, no long-silent chords of affection—”

He paused and bit his lip, for Mr. Waverly, leaning over Pamela Danby's shoulder, said something to her to which she nodded assent, smilingly. There was an exclamation of surprise, and then as if with one accord all turned to look at Xaviera in amazement.

Something like despair—despair akin to rage—mounted to Dr. Fawcett's brain. He touched Xaviera's arm.

“Come,” he said, peremptorily. “Mrs. Browne is ready to leave, and I know you do not care to stay much longer. Come, Xaviera. Say good-night to them—now, now.”

His voice seemed choked with excitement. Frowning a little at his impatience, Xaviera turned to him. The group at the singer's chair had recovered from their momentary surprise, and were discussing something eagerly. And, then, acting on impulse, Xaviera did the very thing Dr. Fawcett did not want her to do. Conquering her aversion, she paused. The touch of the physician's fingers on her arm told her that he had not counted on this—but once done he stood, waiting.

“I am going home,” she said, with a gentle smile. “And I would like to ask you something before I go. There is an old lady in the village—a Mrs. Thornton—whom I am very much interested in. She would like to hear one song from your lips before you leave us. Will you come with me to her to-morrow? Only for a short half hour? We artists,” she spoke winningly, “should be lavish to the poor and the needy of those gifts the good God has been kind enough to bestow on us.”

The woman's lips parted—words trembled on them. And

Xaviera, with the sword above her proud dark head, stood gazing at her with pleading face. Pamela Danby laughed.

"Foolish girl!" she said. "I had almost said unwise daughter! You don't know how ancient you make me feel." And again she laughed, and Dr. Fawcett saw around him the swift exchange of glances. "If I listened to such requests as that I should be singing on the street-corners now for my daily bread. No. I have no time for poor old women—I leave that to the young and innocent. The old are nearing the grave; what pleasure can they take in song or music?"

Xaviera's glance rested on her, not coldly, but with a strange light in its depths. The cold heartlessness of the speech wounded her to the core. She bent her head silently, and turned away. The mocking smile, the covert sneer, did not annoy her. She felt, rather, all the desolation of that lonely heart—the heart that had prayed for but one thing during all these years.

Dr. Fawcett himself brought the soft wrap that she wore and put it close about her shoulders. He helped her into the carriage, he took a seat beside her. Deep thankfulness, great joy were shining from his face. There had been a reprieve. Dared he hope that God would grant a lifelong one? The tenderness—nay, it was more than tenderness—it was the protecting affection toward a dear one, rather—that marked the man's movements, was not lost on Phyllis. She no longer saw him in the abstract—she saw him as a creature of flesh and blood. He loved Xaviera, then. The girl's heart did not feel a pang—rather she rejoiced at it. After all, he had been but a possibility—and what was a possibility to Phyllis Gordon? What a wonderful marriage that would be—his and Xaviera's! With the flights of fancy to which she was prone, she began at once to build castles in the air that lasted long after

she had bidden both the occupants of those castles good-night. And perhaps a little vein of triumph, so contrary is the mind of woman, mingled with her thoughts: she was glad Aunt Mary had been mistaken!

She did not know—not one of them knew—that Xaviera had to face another ordeal, late as it was. For when she entered the hall she saw a light burning in the apartment that was work-room as well as parlor. This was unusual. She pushed the door open, fearing that something might have happened during her absence—that one of her aunts might be ill. Magdalen Pomeroy was standing at the window and turned a severe and wrinkled countenance toward her.

“What is it? Aunt Winifred is—”

“I have been waiting for you,” said the woman, in a cold voice. “I wanted to hear the truth from your own lips, girl. Come in, come in.”

Wondering very much, Xaviera obeyed. Aunt Magdalen, a tall, forbidding figure, faced her.

“Is it true—you see, I am giving you the benefit of the doubt, because you are my niece—is it true that when you left this house to-night you went to sing with a creature called Danby at the Gables?”

“A creature called Danby!” echoed Xaviera, in blank astonishment. “I went to hear Miss Danby sing, ostensibly—but that was not the only reason. I wish you would let me tell you all, everything, Aunt Magdalen. I should like to talk to you—just once—in confidence. Will you not permit me—”

She put out her hand, almost imploringly. Magdalen Pomeroy waved it aside, and her forbidding face grew darker, as if the emotion that burned within her breast would not be contained.

"She—that woman—was in your society. You were with her—spoke to her—perhaps even invited her to call on you—"

"Scarcely that," said Xaviera. "Scarcely that. But I certainly spoke to her. I could not avoid it. If you would listen—"

The eyes under the heavy thatched brows burned with a red flame.

"It was not enough that you should seek daily the house of my only and my bitterest enemy, Muriel Thornton, whom I hate and who hates me. No, that was not enough! I might have known you were my brother's child! But you shall never wring my heart, you shall not bring further shame upon me!"

Xaviera stood mutely before her—awed by the concentrated passion in the old voice.

"It shall be the last time," went on Magdalen Pomeroy, from between clenched teeth. "To-morrow you leave this house forever—forever. I refuse to shelter you another day. And I never want to look upon your face again."

This time Xaviera's pride asserted itself. She bowed her head and turned to leave the room.

"You knew what she was before you went there—the vilest woman, the worst—"

"Hush!" said Xaviera, with her hand upon the knob. "Hush. No matter what she is, or where she came from, or what her life has been, or what her life will be, one loving heart still beats for her alone, one aching heart still longs for her with a tender affection that only a mother can feel. You know that Mrs. Thornton is her mother. You say that Mrs. Thornton is your enemy—but Mrs. Thornton says she loves you. You have an enemy, Aunt Magdalen—an enemy that you will carry with you to the grave, and the way that leads beyond—your own hard heart. Your cruel,

cruel, wicked, wicked heart. Are you not a woman? And because your life has been set in bounds can you not sympathize with those beyond your narrow pale? Good-night, Aunt Magdalen. God give you pleasant dreams."

* * * * *

Aunt Winifred was in her room at day-dawn the next morning, her kind old face wrinkled and puckered.

"What is this Magdalen is saying?" she whispered, fearfully. "What in the world has happened? And when? Last night? This morning? And how did she come to—"

"I do not know," said Xaviera. "She accused me of visiting Muriel Thornton—of going to the Gables to sing with Miss Danby. Why she should consider either so dreadful— But Aunt Magdalen never wanted me—she has never liked me. And now it is too late. I shall never try to make her like me."

Aunt Winifred's lips trembled.

"Child, she is queer—I often think her brain wanders. She has a grievance against Muriel Thornton. Surely Muriel told you? It has been smoldering many years. How in the world did you get to know her, to visit her? Any one else in the town but Muriel Thornton. And yet there is no one else you seem to care for except the people on the hill, who are not our kind, Xaviera. You have kept yourself away from us"—she was wringing her hands. "And Muriel Thornton—"

"Ah, Aunt Winifred!" said Xaviera, slowly. She felt sorry at sight of her aunt's genuine distress. "If you but knew the poor, lonely, humble heart of Muriel Thornton! It would be a crime to think that she even wished harm to a human being—"

"Magdalen will ask you to stay again," ventured Winifred, "if you would promise not to visit Muriel—"

"I shall promise no such thing," said Xaviera, decidedly. "And it is unfair to ask it or to expect it. She likes me, and if word of mine can cheer her it shall be said as often as I please to say it and she pleases to hear—"

"But Magdalen is your aunt—your father's sister—"

"Has she been so kind to me that I should consider her now where my own feelings are so deeply concerned?" asked Xaviera. "No, no, Aunt Winifred. I have battled again this prejudice long enough—"

"You will leave Segrovia?"

Xaviera drew herself to her full height, and her eyes kindled.

"No," she said, "I shall not leave Segrovia. Not until my will is broken, not until there is no spark of pride left in me, not until I confess failure. When do you think that will happen, Aunt Winifred?" She looked at her almost defiantly.

"But you will leave us?"

"Yes."

"To go—where?"

"I do not know—yet. I have not made up my mind."

"At least, Xaviera, you will not go to-day?"

Xaviera was silent. Her aunt put a trembling hand on her arm, the tears streaming down her face.

"Am I nothing—am I no one?" she pleaded. "Because Magdalen, with her bitterness— Alas, that is where you get your will, Xaviera! Beware lest that strength of yours turns to your own condemnation. You go about, striving to do good. Many praise you—your talents and your tact. Have you forgotten the good you may do here? Never, by word, or look, or action, have you tried to win Magdalen's favor—"

"That is not true," said Xaviera. "Do not accuse me wrong—"

fully. Aunt Magdalen would not give me the chance to do other than exchange the merest formalities. Business conversation—no more. Last night, when I would have explained, she put me aside as if I were a nonentity. She avoided me at home and abroad. I have even seen her turn into a side street that she might not meet me, and often she has passed me without acknowledging my greeting. You can not accuse me there. For if she is proud and reserved, I, too, have my pride. I will not force myself upon those who do not care for me.”

“But I have done my best.”

“Yes, dear aunt, you have done your best.”

“For my sake, then, you will stay with us? Just a little while longer, dear.” She clung to her arm, beseechingly. “Give me time to get used to the idea. I am old, too, as well as Magdalen or Muriel, and I love you. Do not leave me, Xaviera.”

Much moved, Xaviera put her arms about her.

“Aunt Winifred, I can not stay—I mean to—”

“You promised—you said you would not leave me—” said Aunt Winifred. She was crying.

“Give me time,” whispered Xaviera. “Let me think. At any rate—” she choked back the feeling of protest that rose within her—“at any rate I will not go to-day.”

She had indeed conquered herself, but the triumph tasted bitter. Aunt Winifred embraced her tenderly, and then left her.

Her heart was sore. The events of the previous evening, and its culmination, had left her in a particularly despondent mood. She did not understand. She could grasp nothing clearly, save one thing—and that one the face of the beautiful woman with the mocking eyes—“the vile woman,” Aunt Magdalen had called her. “The vile woman,” who was the daughter of that patient creature

who besieged heaven with her prayers, as St. Monica had done for St. Augustine. Who daily besought grace for the child who had been an innocent little baby prattling at her knee. "The vile woman—"

"I will not believe it," said Xaviera, aloud. "It is not true. Careless she may be—yes, cruelly heartless, but she is not vile."

A great longing for Mrs. Thornton took possession of her. She felt that she must go to her, pour out her heart to her, ask her advice—for only on that one bosom could she find relief from the dreadful oppression weighing her to the earth. But the old lady had been unable to rise that day, and she called out a question feebly as she saw that some one had entered the outer room, pulling aside the curtains to let in the sunlight.

"You are ill," said Xaviera. "You are ill, and I did not know it, dear old mother?"

"God bless you," said Muriel Thornton. And then she added wearily: "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick."

Xaviera understood. She had come to pour out her own sorrows, and now she must assume the rôle of consoler.

"Hasn't any one been here?" she asked.

"Dr. Fawcett. He said he would go in to tell you that I was not well. Is that the reason you came to me so early?"

"I have not seen him," said Xaviera.

"He left me medicine. He felt very bad over something, and talked to me a long while. He can not keep from me the fact that he has seen my daughter—and that she will not come."

"The vile woman!" rang through Xaviera's head again, in Aunt Magdalen's harsh tones. "The vile woman!" She moved restlessly. "Oh, no," she thought, "she can not be wholly vile—with such a mother."

"I, too, have seen her," she began, painfully. "How beautiful she is!"

"Ah, me!" sighed Mrs. Thornton.

"I have spoken to her."

"Spoken to her! You!" And then surprise gave way to the paramount feeling: "I know she will not come—I know she will not come!"

She was silent, folding her hands in prayer a moment.

"You are keeping something from me," she said, then. "Tell me what is it—let me see my girl through your eyes."

Xaviera shuddered. What! Paint that soulless creature as she saw her to this poor mother? "No," she said, drawing off her gloves hurriedly. "Have you had anything to eat to-day? I thought not—and of course you imagine you do not care for anything. But wait until you see how I can prepare it. After that we will sit down—"

"And then you will talk of her?" wistfully. "You will tell me of Muriel?"

"I shall tell you all about last night and of how beautifully she sang, and of how sweet she was—"

She set the door open, so that the old lady could watch her and speak to her as she moved about the little kitchen. Indeed, Mrs. Thornton had never realized how sorrowful a thing it was to live alone until she saw that young figure hovering around her, and heard the girl's winning tones, and felt the pressure of her hands.

"You are a wonderful girl, Xaviera," she said. "You are a dear, good girl. And God will surely bless you."

"I trust so," said Xaviera. "I trust so, for I am thinking of making a change in my life—one in which I shall need His bless-

ing, dear mother." Then she added thoughtfully: "I mean to leave my aunts."

"Leave—your aunts!" The old fear came to the surface. "You are not going away from Segrovia, Xaviera?"

"No. I intend to look for a pretty house of my own—near here."

"And the expense— What will you do—"

"Money?" Xaviera looked at her in surprise. "Oh, I have enough and to spare of that. Did you think I came to Segrovia principally to support myself? Listen to me, now. I am going to get this house, and I want you to come into it with me. I would suggest coming to you"—she glanced about her reflectively—"but there are too many sad memories. You can not forget so readily in this old house. Try it with me a week or two—and the old house will still be here, in case you feel that you have to come back to it. The two Bernard children—I can make room for them also, and I am fond of little Danny. He is such an innocent baby—and I can do them so much good. Dr. Fawcett will see that they are given to my care altogether, and that the father, if he does not behave himself, can not come near them."

The old lady looked at her sorrowfully.

"You would burden yourself with me? With an old, weak—"

"Ah, come to me as my mother—I, who have never known my mother, will love you for her sake."

"Child, the old are troublesome and fidgety, and prone to sickness—"

"No," said Xaviera. "You are not troublesome, and you are not fidgety, and you will not be sick any more, because I intend to take care of you—I, and Elizabeth, and Danny."

"And you will be my daughter?"

The words came from her trembling lips with a sort of holy joy. A strange light was on her face. Her eyes sought the depths of *Xaviera's* soul.

"I will," said the girl.

"Then shall the rest of my pilgrimage be a prayer of thanks." She put her arms about the girl and held her close. "A prayer of thanks—that God has given me back my daughter."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PASSING OF DANNY.

"ONE of the Waverly girls is ill—it is Constance," said Phyllis. "She has always been delicate, as you know, Xaviera, and Mrs. Waverly was so frightened that she sent for Aunt Mary. Aunt Mary is quite useful at times. Though nothing could have tempted her had she known you were coming," and Phyllis laughed brightly. "Now, when I talk of infatuation, etc., she only looks at me. She never says a word, for you have won her heart. You know, she imagines you played last night."

Xaviera moved her shoulders impatiently.

"Dr. Fawcett is placing me in a false position. I shall never play again. If I could have been tempted to do so, I surely would have yielded last night. But that part of my life is over—and now people will not believe it." She looked at Phyllis sharply. "Are you tired? Your face is very pale. What is the matter?"

"Late hours, dissipation, and discoveries," said Phyllis. "Surely enough to leave a mark on such an open countenance as mine. I am not the composed being you affect to be, Xaviera. But give me time to wonder. What are you doing here away from the Pomeroy machines, at this unseasonable hour, most industrious tailor-lady?"

"I am never going back to them," said Xaviera, with energy. "That is why I came to you. I want you to start house-hunting

with me. I thought you might like the novelty of the thing—and we must look for a house as near Mrs. Thornton's as possible."

"Oh, she's away out of the world! You are leaving the Pome-roys? What for?"

"Aunt Magdalen doesn't like my associates," said Xaviera.

"She objected to the Danby woman—I thought she would! Did she say anything else to you? It is not—you and she are not going to live together?"

"I and who?" asked Xaviera. Her face expressed the astonishment she felt. "I and who, Phyllis?"

"Miss Danby, of course."

"Miss Danby, of course? The singer?" Xaviera stared at her. "The singer? Oh! You have heard that she is Muriel Thornton's daughter? Is that it? No, I never expect to see her again. What made you think she meant to live with me? You do not mean to say that she will remain permanently at Segrovia?" Xaviera asked anxiously. "In that case I must reconsider my plans once more. She surely means to take her mother—"

Phyllis shrugged her shoulders.

"One hears many queer things," she said. "So that one scarcely knows what is coming next. Xaviera," she went on thoughtfully, "once you seemed to imply that Dr. Fawcett cared for me—you did not say he did, but you seemed to look upon it as a sort of possibility. Do you still believe it?"

"Are you not wise in the ways of the world, little one? Why do you ask me that question?"

"I like to hear your opinions."

"I have none," said Xaviera, truthfully. "I have been so engrossed in my own affairs of late that others have had but little place in my thoughts. This may sound like a confession of selfish-

ness," she went on. "I can only tell you that I would like Dr. Fawcett to care for you, because—"

"Wait," said Phyllis. "We speak of angels—that is his step in the hall. This is the time for his usual visit to Aunt Mary. Come in," she added, pleasantly.

"Do not rise—I do not wish to disturb you," said Dr. Fawcett as he entered. "Your aunt, Miss Phyllis?"

"Gone to the Waverlys—they sent for her. Constance has had another attack."

"I know."

"They sent for Aunt Mary about a half hour ago. Sit down, doctor—you are not disturbing us. She may be in at any moment now."

"Thank you." He greeted Xaviera with friendly courtesy. "I am astonished to see you here."

"It is unusual," said Xaviera.

"You have heard that Frayer's place is in the market?" he went on. "And that Frayer actually meant it when he said he was leaving? He will probably not wait to settle his affairs—but place them in Waverly's hands."

The doctor, ordinarily, never repeated the gossip of the town. But for this bit of news he received his reward in the expression of relief that crossed Xaviera's features.

"That is good," she said.

Phyllis made a wry face.

"Perhaps it is," she said. "But we shall lose a number of fine entertainments. I, for one, certainly enjoyed his dinners. They reminded me of New York." A cloud swept over her fair countenance. "Alas, for the days that are no more!" she continued, with a mocking little laugh at herself,

"Oh, for the days that will be no more!" said Xaviera, in a voice fraught with feeling. "Thank God for the days that will be no more."

"Even with the incentive that he had, it was singular that a man of Frayer's temperament should have been satisfied to live in Segrovia so long," went on Phyllis. "Of course, we all realized that Xaviera was the attraction—" a sudden light dawned on the girl. "The house on the hill, Xaviera! Was that he? Was it he whom we saw that night in the house on the hill?"

Xaviera bowed her head.

"And I never recognized him! Oh, Xaviera, no wonder you were afraid. Where did you get your courage? I wish you could teach me a tenth of it."

"Can courage be taught?"

Silence rested between the three. Dr. Fawcett did not understand. Xaviera's forehead was wrinkled painfully; Phyllis stared at her, comprehending, in part, the pressure that had been brought to bear upon her, the persistence and the strength of will.

"I hope he leaves without any untoward happening," said Dr. Fawcett, suddenly, and as if talking to himself. "So far, a special providence seems to have taken care of you. If he goes honorably now, if he is only man enough—you can be happy all the rest of your life at Segrovia."

His eyes rested on her with a kind light in their depths.

"You mean that he may try to injure me?" Xaviera laughed and straightened her shoulders. "I am not afraid. I was once—but never of bodily harm."

"Your lack of fear is your greatest danger."

"My greatest safety!" she rejoined. "My greatest safety. No. My brother was right in sending me here—among my own.

Nowhere else could I have conquered that first, absurd, womanish fear. And if I had not—”

“If you had not—”

“Mr. Frayer would not have gone alone.”

“I am not thinking of physical danger,” said Dr. Fawcett.

“I am not talking of physical danger,” said Xaviera.

“Mr. Frayer!” said Fanny, at the door.

It was an unwelcome announcement to all three. Xaviera rose at once. Dr. Fawcett did not know that he was frowning savagely. Phyllis, with some semblance of courtesy, turned to the newcomer, smiling.

“I shall interrupt you but a moment,” he said. There was a sneer on his face. “Unpleasant as it may seem to be summoned from such charming surroundings, Dr. Fawcett, I am sent for you. Constance Waverly seems to have taken a change for the worse. And may I ask you to hurry? My bays are restive—my man can not hold them long.”

Dr. Fawcett was on his feet immediately. Mr. Frayer turned on his heel and left the room as soon as he had finished speaking, and ran lightly down the walk to where a pair of massive bays stood champing impatiently at the bits. Phyllis followed him, asking a question or two concerning Miss Waverly—she had time to do this, for Dr. Fawcett bent over Xaviera for a few parting, hurried words. Frayer did not hear Miss Gordon’s questions. He stared at Xaviera—and from her to the physician.

“What is it?” he asked, with a disagreeable smile. “There is an understanding, then, between Dr. Fawcett and the fair Xaviera?”

“I do not know,” said Phyllis, drawing back.

“They would suit each other well,” he continued. “They

are— Get out of there, you little imp!” to a child, who, running along the road, stopped short when he saw Xaviera’s tall figure at the door.

“Go back!” shouted the servant.

Danny was startled. He stood still, not knowing what to do. Frayer reached over and took the whip; he was white with rage—he no longer knew what he was doing. As the lash whizzed through the air and caught at Danny’s shoulders and burned about his little neck, he screamed aloud with pain and fright. The sound of the lash above them, and the child’s wild scream, were too much for the high-strung animals. The next instant they were dashing madly up the road, with Frayer sawing at the reins, and a quiet little body lay almost in the selfsame spot whence Xaviera had picked it up those months before.

With a gasp of horror Xaviera sprang forward, thrusting Phyllis aside.

“Danny!” she cried, in a voice of anguish. “Danny!” And then when he made no sign, no movement: “It is my fault. He saw me; he wished to come to me—to his friend! Oh, the poor little baby, the poor little baby!” she said, in piteous accents, as she clasped the quiet body to her heart. “Danny, Danny, dear little fellow! See, here is Elizabeth coming! Won’t you listen, Danny?”

Some one stooping over her took the lifeless form from her, gathering her close with his other arm, lifting her from the ground, supporting her, so that at length she stood upon her feet. She was dizzy and faint, and held to that arm with both trembling hands.

“Oh, see to him,” she whispered then. “See to him. He is not dead—surely he is not dead? Does not misfortune seem to

pursue all those who care for me? I can not stand it any longer—I will not. I am beaten—I acknowledge it.” She wrung her hands together. “I am beaten, beaten, beaten! I will not try any more. It is over. Let me go. The poor little chap, the poor little fellow! And through me! What will Elizabeth do? O God!”

“He isn’t dead?” asked Phyllis, in a tremulous voice now. “He surely is not dead, Dr. Fawcett?”

Xaviera waited, her hands covering her eyes, waiting for an answer to that question. None came. Instead, the clasp of the arm about her tightened, almost crushing her to him, as if showing her by the very strength of his body that he was her friend. She struggled, and released herself, trying desperately to recover her calm, to recollect her surroundings. The servants were gathered at the gate, awestruck and wondering.

“You can do something—” she began, pleadingly.

Her eyes sought the childish face, half-fearfully—the face resting on Dr. Fawcett’s shoulder. The white lips, the drooping lids with the glaze of blue beneath told the story.

“Oh, no,” she said. “It is all over. It is too late.”

“He did not suffer,” said Dr. Fawcett, in a low tone. “And he is past my helping now. It seems like fate that he should have met his death on the very spot where death almost found him four months ago. Miss Gordon, I shall have to trouble you again. Take him inside, John,” to the man who now came forward. “I must go on to the Waverlys—I may be of use there. Will you stay here until I return, Miss Pomeroy?”

He spoke winningly, indeed, but the girl’s face, set as if carved in stone, was turned away from him.

“Please stay, Xaviera,” said Phyllis.

"No," she said drearily. "Phyllis has the servants to keep her company—she does not need me. I must be alone. I must be alone, or I shall go mad."

She turned from them, even as she spoke. Dr. Fawcett bit his underlip—his eyes followed her. He made a step forward—then drew back again, shaking his head. There was a hopeless droop to the slim figure, the dark head was bowed. Any one looking after her would know that Xaviera Pomeroy had said no idle words when she acknowledged her defeat that day. Every line in her face, every tottering step she took, proclaimed the fact that she was suffering from a cruel blow.

Phyllis began to cry.

"I never saw her look like that," she said. "Oh, Dr. Fawcett, go on to the Waverlys, since the call is so imperative, and then to her. I dare not—she would not have me. She wants some one strong, bold—one who will fight the bitterness for her. I feel as if some awful thing were about to happen. I am glad that I am not strong like her," she went on, shuddering. "It is so dreadful when a strong nature weakens."

"She has not weakened!" burst forth the physician, hotly. "She dare not weaken now—she has too much at stake— For if this is weakness, real weakness, what will she do when the bitterest blow of all descends upon her?"

* * * * *

Xaviera climbed the stairs to her own room, her limbs trembling. Aunt Winifred heard her, and came to the door, asking her if she were not hungry, telling her that lunch was ready—but Xaviera, if she heard, gave no sign. Aunt Winifred stood staring after her. What a strange expression! And that tottering step! Was she taking Magdalen's unfortunate scolding so much to heart?

She loved Xaviera indeed, but she was afraid of her in the same way that she feared Magdalen—so intense was the reserve in which the girl had clothed herself. She listened to hear her moving about upstairs, but after the closing of the door, silence reigned. A half hour later Dr. Fawcett came hurriedly into the room where both sisters were at work.

“Where is Miss Xaviera?” he asked.

“Xaviera?” echoed Winifred, with a hesitating look at Magdalen. “She went upstairs half an hour ago.”

“Show me to her room—at once,” he said, peremptorily.

“She is ill—I knew there was something the matter,” began Winifred in a flutter. “What has happened?”

“That remains to be seen,” he said, curtly. Much disturbed, Aunt Winifred rose and led the way.

“Here is the doctor,” she called. “Open the door, Xaviera.”

After a time they heard her rise—the next instant the bolt was drawn. When they entered Xaviera was standing in the center of the room, holding the back of a chair to steady herself. Her eyes met Dr. Fawcett’s with a bewildered stare in them.

“You are very much shaken, I suppose,” said Dr. Fawcett. He took her wrist and held it. “If you will get me a glass of water, Miss Winifred—”

Xaviera drew her hand from him.

“Why do you bother, why?” she asked. “I want to be let alone.”

“You are exasperating!” he exclaimed. “Why don’t you let yourself go? You know it is unnatural for any woman to force back her weakness in this fashion—”

Miss Winifred returned.

"This powder on your tongue—and a mouthful of water. After that, lie down. You will sleep."

"For how long?"

"Long enough to give your nerves a little rest." Then his curt tone changed. "You will do this, Xaviera?"

"Yes," she said, obediently, tired of protest. "I will do it."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BENDING OF THE TREE.

IT was early the next day, and the hour of little Danny's funeral. Phyllis, with a stubbornness that carried all before it, insisted that the boy be buried from her aunt's house, and Aunt Mary, struck, not so much by the persistency of the girl as by this evidence of feeling on her part, allowed her to have her own way, but hurried the preparations, since she did not want her house turned into a house of mourning. The child's body was covered with flowers, and laid in the daintiest of caskets. Mr. Frayer, who had had a very narrow escape himself the day before, called with words of commiseration on his lips—seeming to think that if he offered to defray all expenses he had done enough to atone for the little life crushed out by his momentary yielding to rage. Phyllis would not permit this. She felt that what she did for Danny was done for Xaviera. The aversion on her face told Frayer that she understood how completely this unhappy occurrence was his fault. And when he spoke of Xaviera, Phyllis' indignation knew no bounds.

"I don't think she will ever get over it," she burst out, passionately. "Never, the longest day I live, shall I forget her face. I wish you had seen it!" said the girl. "I know you are sorry—you would not be human if you weren't a little sorry—but I *wish* you had seen her face. If I loved anybody, I think—nay, I *know*,

that I would rather die a thousand deaths than bring such an expression to his face as *Xaviera's* wore when you killed *Danny!*"

He did not like the words. They stung him.

"That is *Xaviera's* way—she looks on the serious side of things," he said.

Xaviera stood at her window. She had not been able to leave her room since, because of the strange weakness that had overpowered her at the sight of *Danny's* little dead face, and which still clung to her. *Phyllis* had sent word that they would pass the *Pomeroy's* on the way to the cemetery, so that she might see the last of her little protégé. And now she leaned far out of the window, watching them until the bend of the road hid them from her.

"I will go in on my way back," said *Phyllis*. "*Xaviera* surely needs a friend now—yet I wonder why I have the impression that the worst is still to come? But one thing I know—she must be roused, since she is never happy in idleness. I will bring *Elizabeth* with me." She gathered the little girl closer to her in great pity, and *Dr. Fawcett* gazed at her in admiration. "That is it," she said. "That is an inspiration. I will bring *Elizabeth* to her, and leave *Elizabeth* there. She will comfort her, and be herself again."

"Where has the frivolous *Miss Gordon* learned all this?" asked the physician. *Phyllis* leaned toward him.

"From *Xaviera*, principally—and from the foot of that altar where *Xaviera* is leading us—my aunt and me. How could one know her—see her every day—without being touched by her greatness of soul? *My* soul was dead—she brought it to life for me—as she said she would."

"I am beginning to think it useless endeavor to keep that other story from her," said Dr. Fawcett.

"Why?"

"It will come out—surely. Some one will blurt it out to her. If we can only stave it off until the woman is gone—and Frayer. She will not feel it then—at least not so much."

"Need it make any difference?" asked Phyllis softly.

"Any difference?" he echoed. "Any difference? She is herself—pure, true, high-minded—"

"And you love her," said Phyllis.

"And I love her," he ended with a sigh. "I love her."

Phyllis looked at him defiantly.

"Why not?" she questioned, with rising color. "Why not?"

"Because she does not love me," he finished, simply.

Phyllis laughed.

"Perhaps we butterflies are wiser than you wise men after all, Dr. Fawcett."

He shook his head gravely.

* * * * *

Circumstances so ordained that Xaviera, destined to undergo what trials she must bear in the harshest manner possible, was to face this one, that her friends dreaded for her, alone. Scarcely had the last carriage vanished from her sight and she had drawn back from the window into her room again, than she heard a low tapping at her door. It was a messenger, who brought bad news.

Muriel Thornton wanted her.

Xaviera, bending over the shaken figure, knew at once that death had set his seal upon her forehead. The girl's strong heart had been greatly moved by the unexpected and tragic ending of the little boy. She had seen his hopeful, eager face, as, heedless of

the warning cries and the impending lash, he darted forward to seek the friend who ever had a kind word or smile for him. The next instant he had disappeared from view—and then she saw the childish figure with the ghastly countenance upturned, and the look of terror frozen forever in the dark-blue eyes. Thank God, the innocent little soul had found its Maker without further pain or sorrow. She dreaded this call to Muriel Thornton's side—for some instinct told her the truth. And then a smile, infinitely pathetic, curved the corners of her sad mouth. Was it not fitting that Muriel Thornton should go—that one by one those for whom she cared were taken from her? One by one her plans were check-mated. One by one the great Mover of the chessboard of life defeated her. Yes; it was but fitting that Muriel Thornton should go.

And then that great faith which Christ, through our noble priests and martyrs, our bishops and our popes, has preserved to us, came to her aid. When most she needed it, strength was given. New life seemed to flood through all her being; high purpose, exaltation claimed her.

“Into Thy hands, O Lord!” she said, gently. “It may be that I have not relied enough on Thee. Into Thy holy hands I give my days, my thoughts, my actions. Dearer lives than these have slipped away from me—and Thou hast helped me bear the blow. What purpose there may be in all these later ills, I can not tell. Help me, that I may be resigned. Help me, that I may not ask.”

She did what she could for her old friend, and the day slipped away from her. Toward evening Father Powers came to administer the last sacraments. There was no pain—nothing but a gradual lessening of her hold on life. Heartbreak had brought Muriel

Thornton to her present straits—and Father Powers knew it as well as Xaviera.

What could she say to her to ease her passage to eternity? She held the trembling hands in hers, after Father Powers had gone, and spoke what comforting words she could. The daughter of this woman—where was she? Did no voice whisper to the haughty, beautiful creature that her mother—the mother who had borne her—lay dying in a little room, with her name upon her lips? Did no sting of conscience rouse her, telling her that the mother who had wept so many tears for her, who had suffered and prayed for her, was about to pass away forever? That though it might be the twelfth hour indeed, there was time, there still was time to throw herself upon her knees, to receive that precious dying blessing, that last fond kiss, that last look of love? To give the promise of a better life, a life of repentance, so that this woman might depart in peace?

The hours wore on, and Xaviera knew that she would have to pass the night here now—there was no one to take her place. She did not falter from the task. . . . Some day, perhaps, because of this, there would be one to watch beside her. . . . To watch with her along the way that leads beyond. . . .

Muriel Thornton rose on her pillows, the agony of death on her pinched face.

“Child, child!” she groaned.

Xaviera bent above her, putting her ear close to the panting lips.

“Muriel!” she begged. “Muriel!”

Ah! That weak and piteous call could not reach the ears of the one for whom it was intended even though it pierced the heart of the girl who heard it.

"Muriel! Muriel!" she sobbed again. And once more:
"Muriel, my little Muriel!"

"O God!" said Xaviera, with bated breath. "O God, comfort her. I can not. God, help her!"

"Muriel, my daughter!" sobbed the quavering voice. "My beautiful one! Could you but see me die! Oh, cruel!"

Xaviera's sorrowful dark eyes were on the white face.

"You are going away from me, mother—you are going away from me—you who have promised to be my mother," she said.

"I would have stayed, dear—but God does not will it so," breathed Muriel Thornton. "Xaviera, will you call her? Call her now. Tell her that her mother can not die until she has looked upon her face in kindness. Xaviera, call my girl to me."

"Mother!" cried Xaviera. "Shall I? Shall I? Will you stay alone without me? You will not be afraid? And I will go for her and bring her to you."

It was late—the difficulties in the way almost insuperable, and she spoke the words half-fearfully. But the light of life that sprang across the withered face was sufficient answer, sufficient impulse to nerve her to deeds of daring.

"Dear girl, you will do this? Go, then, in the name of God."

No hesitation now—no drawing back. Bending above her, Xaviera kissed with lingering tenderness the cold lips that she might never press in life again. Then, taking the crucifix, she placed it in the dying woman's fingers, and with words of hope, set out upon her mission—the one mission above all others repugnant to her. This natural feeling of repugnance strove for mastery, but the iron will was there—the will that had ever helped her. She closed the door of the sitting-room behind her, and stood in the hall. Then she knew that there was some one else beside

herself who had come to see Muriel Thornton die. Startled for the instant she bent forward, trying to recognize the outlines in the dim light.

"Who is it?" she asked. "Who is there?"

No answer from the figure, standing with face averted. Yet there was something familiar in the straightness of shoulders and the mass of iron-gray hair. Xaviera laid her hand upon her arm, and pulled her toward her, shrinking then as she met those glowing dark eyes.

"Aunt Magdalen!" she said.

They looked at each other. The girl questioning, fearing. The woman abashed, pathetic, entreating. With quivering mouth and appealing mien she held out her hands.

"It is true?" she asked, in a broken voice. And Xaviera, listening, knew that some strong emotion was working in this woman's breast. "Muriel is—dead?"

"Not dead," came the response. "But dying. She is dying, Aunt Magdalen. You came for—me?"

The woman shook her head.

"No, I did not come for you."

"To upbraid, then, to taunt, perhaps to protest against my visits?" A faint tinge of scorn crept into the clear voice.

"None of these things," said Magdalen Pomeroy. "None of these things, Xaviera."

The girl was silent.

"When they told me she was dead—" went on her aunt. "She is not dead, Xaviera?"

"She will not live an hour," said Xaviera. "And I am going for her daughter."

"You? She asked you to go?"

"She asked me to go."

"You know, then, who her daughter is? She has told—"

"Yes, yes, I know," said Xaviera, hurriedly. "A mother's dying wish—what holier thing in the world, Aunt Magdalen?"

"Nothing—save a dying friend's forgiveness," murmured Magdalen Pomeroy. "Death! I have always been afraid of death. Xaviera, there is much I would like to say to her who was once my friend—who was my schoolmate long ago, my more than sister. Will it hurt her if I go to her now?"

She spoke pleadingly—hung upon the girl's lips as if afraid of what her answer might be. Xaviera, turning, opened the door for her.

"She is in yonder room," she said. "In yonder room, alone. Nothing can hurt her now, Aunt Magdalen, and it is a holy office to stay with those who lie like her to-night. Go to her, Aunt Magdalen, and comfort her. I fear that my mission will be in vain. And if it is, do you ask God to let her die without knowing of the disappointment—to let her die without knowing that the girl whom she loved refused to come to her. God give you words, Aunt Magdalen."

And so saying, the girl drew the door to behind her, and went out into the dark of the midnight alone.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BITTEREST BLOW OF ALL.

To travel on foot through lonely country roads at midnight is somewhat of an ordeal even for those used to the utter silence and darkness of such surroundings. It needed a stout heart to plunge into the bypaths and cross-cuts that led, by shortest route, to the principal street of the village and the hotel *Xaviera* sought. But she was in a race with death, and so keen a race that she had no time for fear. She gave no thought to herself—for she felt, too, that it was a race for a soul. She knew that if *Pamela Danby*—or *Muriel Thornton*, if she would call her by her real name—could but see her mother before she died that it would mean her future redemption. So *Xaviera* stumbled on through weeds and grasses, up steep little hills, and down into the hollows, with but that one purpose in her mind: how best to reach *Pamela Danby's* side, and once there, how to force her to come to the one who loved her more than life.

The hotel was brilliantly illuminated—and now as she approached it she became conscious of a certain hesitancy. It was filled, as she knew, with summer visitors, fresh from the conventionalities of city life, its usages and conformities. What would they think of a girl who came out after midnight alone and unprotected—

Her lip curled at her own folly. What had people's thoughts or vain imaginings to do with *Xaviera Pomeroy*? The clerk who

sat just inside the door did not know her. He was a stranger, and he looked somewhat superciliously at the pale-faced girl who stood before him, blinking a little in the glare of light after the darkness through which she had made her way this past half hour.

"You will tell me on what floor I can find Miss Danby, please?"

The cultured voice, the haughty curve of the head, brought the young man's nose down quickly.

"Third floor to the right," he said. "Miss Danby is entertaining this evening."

Surely that tired-looking, pale-faced girl could have nothing pleasant to impart to the beautiful Miss Danby?

"She might not care to see any one just now," he continued. "If you will give me your card—"

"I have no card with me," said Xaviera. "And she will care to see me. I have an important message for her—one that can not be put off."

She turned toward the stairs. Miss Danby was entertaining! And Miss Danby's mother—

She stood on the third landing, undecided what to do next. Uproarious laughter came from the rooms to the right—and suddenly a burst of song in a beautiful voice that started a drinking-chorus, in which other and deeper voices joined. Flushing hotly, Xaviera still wavered. What should she do? Break in upon this scene of revelry? She would have nothing for her pains—nothing. And what would they think of her?

Frayer was there. She heard his tones now, sounding clearly above all the others. Something burned in her throat; lights danced before her eyes. No. Not even for Muriel Thornton's sake would she venture into the camp of her enemy.

A mother's love, a mother's tears! How dared she consider human respect, human opinions, weighing these holy things against them? With a quick uprearing of her dark head, Xaviera went to the door, and, without preliminary knocking, threw it wide. And there she stood upon the threshold, a slim, tall, straight figure, and the light encircled her—her proud face, her deep eyes, her set lips. So she stood, and so they saw her—that little gathering of boon companions who had come, at Pamela Danby's bidding, to her noisy supper-table.

Silence, solemn and profound, rested upon them all—upon the gentlemen: Mr. Waverly, and Allison Frayer, whose eyes kindled at the sight of her, and three others, whom Xaviera had never seen before. Pamela Danby, beautifully gowned, covered with gems, paused in the lifting of a wineglass to her lips, and fastened her mocking eyes on the white, white face. Her only woman companion turned a fair blonde head toward the girl, languidly, questioningly.

And then suddenly the singer laughed aloud—a low, mellow laugh that seemed to fill every corner of the room.

“Welcome!” she cried, putting her wineglass on the table. “Make room beside you, Frayer, for this new guest of mine. Did I not tell you that you should have a surprise ere the night was done? Come in, my girl!” she said, airily. “Here is company, laughter, light, song! And wine, good wine! A toast, gentlemen! A toast to the belated guest! A toast to the beautiful Xaviera Pomeroy—”

Frayer was on his feet with flushed face and sparkling eyes. He advanced to the girl, who stood there without seeing him—her eyes upon that gem-decked figure at the table, struggling to overcome the disgust that filled her—the disgust that overwhelmed

her. He touched her arm. Glancing up, she recognized him, and shrank from him in loathing.

"Do not put one finger of yours on me, Allison Frayer," she said. "My presence is not for you—nor my message."

"You are daring to venture this," he said.

"Xaviera Pomeroy may venture anything," was the defiant retort, her eyes kindling like those of an animal at bay. He smiled and drew the door close behind her. She did not seem to notice it—in fact, she had already advanced into the room, and circling the table, reached the singer's side. A wonderful glow spread over her cold face and made it tender.

"Come," she said, in gentle accents, and her voice was soft and sweet and pleading as a child's might be. "Come. I do not appeal to Miss Danby now—the beautiful singer whom men are proud to honor—but to Muriel Thornton, the daughter of a mother who lies dying. Lies—dying!" She repeated the words. "Calling, calling, calling upon one name: 'Muriel, my little Muriel, my baby Muriel! My daughter, whom I love, my child!' Come, come, come!"

She held out her two hands appealingly. Pamela Danby's face had changed indeed—she half-started to her feet. A film seemed to shut the sparkle from her dazzling blue eyes. For a moment, just one single moment, the better nature of the woman struggled within her. The diamonds on her bosom rose and fell, her lips quivered. Then, throwing back her shining head, she lifted the wineglass to her mouth and drained it.

"Faugh!" she said. "'Tis but a good excuse to enter our merry ranks. You need not put in such a plea, Miss Pomeroy—nor did we need excuse to invite you to join us. Remain, remain. What have you or I to do with death? You horrify me! Are we

not young, are we not beautiful? Why should we torment our gay and happy lives with the hideous last moments of a dying hag!"

"A dying hag!"

Xaviera reeled backward, grasping at the chair nearest her.

"A dying hag!"

No, she would not believe her ears. She bent her searching gaze upon the fair and careless face. In all her hardened life, actress as she was and heartless, Pamela Danby had never met a look like that. The incredulous horror of it, the question—

"My God!" said the girl. And then: "Only His almighty power can move you. I appeal to God! Oh!" she cried, "you, too, will die alone—you, too, will die without one to comfort you! Miserable, unhappy, wicked, cruel woman, to deny your mother! Oh, it is impossible! I will not trust my own ears—you can not, with such a face as that, have such a heart. Think of her! Why, she raised you from you were a little child, hung upon your baby words, kissed your lips and fondled you—"

"Will some one ask her to explain?" said Pamela Danby, languidly. "Some—one—please—ask—her—to—explain? For I can not suffer much more of this. We know that you have histrionic talent. It is an inheritance, is it not, my friend?" There was a sneer on her lips. She addressed Frayer, but he sat with eyes fastened on Xaviera's face.

"Hush!" he said, then, springing to his feet. "Come away, Xaviera—"

"She has inherited it," went on the mocking voice. She turned to the girl, furiously. "Who are you that comes preaching to me of filial duty, of daughterly devotion? Begging me to do thus or so when your actions are but the reflection of those you

accuse me of! Look to yourself before you assume the accusation of others!"

Her voice was so furious that Xaviera felt a sudden chill creep over her.

"Introduce Miss Pomeroy to her mother!" went on Pamela Danby. "I pray you, Lord Frayer, you who brought me here for Miss Pomeroy's special benefit, that she might see me and be proud of me, introduce the young lady to her mother!"

Bewildered, the girl put up her arm as if to ward off a blow, staring at the woman with her heart in her eyes. She could not understand. There was a muttered exclamation. Waverly touched Frayer in warning. There was pity on his face.

And then the door was flung wide for the second time that night, and a mighty presence entered—a tall, strong man whose countenance was white and desperate with rage, and whose eyes were burning. He pushed them aside as if they were straws, sent Frayer reeling against the table, while he made his way to Xaviera and stood with her, shoulder to shoulder, looking at them, his gaze the concentrated one of scorn and fury, but his lips silent.

And the evil spirit in Allison Frayer broke loose.

"Why not?" he cried aloud. And he laughed. "Gentlemen, you have all heard the truth—it is an old story. Beautiful daughter of a beautiful mother, I congratulate you. Miss Pamela Danby, in private life, Mrs. Francis Pomeroy, widow, I doubly congratulate you on this accession to your home circle! Let us stand aside!"

"Ah, no—rather let us drink to her health—to my daughter's health," said Pamela Danby. "To me and to mine!"

There was a slight smile at the corners of Xaviera's mouth.

Pamela Danby leaned forward, the devil that had taken possession of her rejoicing.

"To me and to mine!" she repeated. "To my husband who is dead, and to my son, who has followed his father—and to you, my daughter, who are spared to me."

Those sacred names, those well-beloved names! Those names breathed through the silence of the night in love and yearning! This woman claimed them—claimed her dead—

"It is a lie!" said Xaviera, calmly. "My mother was a good and noble woman, and she died—"

"A good and noble woman—that I grant you," said Pamela Danby, laughing. "But she did not die. No, nor is she likely to die for many, many years. So!" She looked at her meaningly. "You thought to despise me—to stand aloof from me—to hold up to me a code of morals, and my blood runs in your veins!"

"Family recriminations," said Frayer, in a sharp, high voice.

"That will do," said the man who stood beside Xaviera Pomeroy. "You have at least the appearance of a man, Mr. Frayer. Although it will be difficult, try to pretend you are one. Come, Xaviera."

It seemed natural that he should be there. Her eyes clung to his face.

"I will not believe it," she said. "It is not true. Such a thing as that could not be true."

"You told me you were strong," he said. "Sufficient to yourself. Remember that now. Bring that will to your assistance. Come away from here."

"I can not move," she said. Her lips were parched and dry. "I can not. There is no power in my limbs."

"Lean upon me," he urged. "Lean upon me. Let me carry you—Xaviera, I—Anything, anything, so that you leave here—"

"Tell me," she went on, heedless of his words. "Tell me."

"I can not," he said, inwardly groaning.

"It is not true, then?" Hopefulness sprang suddenly to her face. "It is not true?"

"Give me your burden to bear," he said, imploringly. "Am I not your friend—"

But the question in that face compelled an answer.

"Yes, Xaviera, Pamela Danby is your mother—the daughter of the poor old woman you have befriended so long, unconscious that she was indeed of your own flesh and blood."

She grasped the meaning of his words—she responded at once to the guiding pressure of his hand. She turned toward the door, very quietly. Not a breath stirred in the room—every eye watched her. As she reached the threshold a sigh burst from her—one sigh. It told so plainly of the breaking heart within her breast that with one accord the men seated at the table exchanged glances—then rose simultaneously—excepting Frayer.

"It is getting late," said Mr. Waverly, in an abrupt tone. "I must get home."

* * * * *

Dr. Fawcett drew the girl along the hall, down the stairs, out into the night.

"Where am I going?" she asked, in an irritated voice. "I am tired. I can not walk any farther."

"Just a few steps now," he said. "You are going home."

"Home!" Her head drooped, her arms hung limply. "Home! I am going home!"

He bit his underlip savagely. The utter dreariness of the tone unmanned him.

"This is the time now, Xaviera," he said. "As you bear this so will your future life be. Let me help you—"

"I need no help," she said, meekly. "I need no help. What is there to help?"

He took her hand, troubled.

"Xaviera, you frighten me. Weep, dear, weep—anything but this unnatural quiet."

"I see no cause for weeping," she said, and her tone was quite rational. "Have you been to Mrs. Thornton's?"

"I came from there. The woman was not in her right mind, or she would not have sent you. Were they all mad to let you go into the very jaws of danger? It has threatened you since Pamela Danby came. But you are strong, Xaviera."

"Yes, I am strong." She smiled pitifully. "I am strong. Was Aunt Magdalen there?"

"Yes."

"Mrs. Thornton was alive—when you came?"

"At the very last ebb."

"She may last until I get to her, then?"

"Xaviera, you shall not go there again to-night."

"Her daughter would not come," said Xaviera. "Her daughter—my mother—would not come! And I—I am her granddaughter. Shall I not be with her at that last moment? If God will but spare her until I come. She knew? She knew it all the time?"

"Yes."

"If she had but told—told me. I would not have left her."

"You can stand no more to-night, Xaviera."

She laughed.

"The world could crumble to pieces about me now—my world is in pieces!" she said. "What would you have me do? Go to Aunt Winifred, I suppose? Go home—to bed—to sleep—to rest—Ah!" she shuddered so violently that she stumbled and would have fallen had he not supported her. "I shall never rest again! If my strength will but last—"

"For what—to do what?"

"To go away."

"Go away?"

"Yes. There, you are my friend." She spoke hastily, feverishly. "Let me go to Mrs. Thornton's—and then when all is over, help me to steal away quietly. I need nothing. I have all the money I require here in my purse. Oh, it will be so good to get away. You know. I want to go somewhere—in solitude. Where I shall hear no human voice. I want to lie somewhere with my face to the earth—alone. Just to be alone. I shall surely try to rest then—and it will be so good. You have been kind to me always. Help me to do this."

"Xaviera," he said, and his voice trembled. He stood still and put his arms about her, bringing her head to his shoulder almost savagely. "You shall rest—but here, here, on my breast—your resting-place forever. Xaviera, I love you, girl. I love you with all my heart and with all my soul. I love you so that my one thought is for you—my one desire, Xaviera, my love!"

"Oh, no," she said, a little wearily. "You are too kind."

"Oh, yes," he said. "And if I am kind it is only to myself. Do you know where we are standing? On the very spot, where, six months ago, I met you first, and insisted on seeing you to your

door. I did not understand you then, Xaviera—but I knew there was nothing but goodness under that quiet, quiet manner. Dear heart, I think I loved you then. But I did not realize it—not until that night on which Allison Frayer gave his dance, and I thought I saw you with him on the hill road. Blind, unreasoning jealousy filled me. I came to find you, resolved to save you from that man, even though you scorned me for my intervention. I learned that it was Pamela Danby. She has your height—your grace of movement—”

“My mother!” said Xaviera, and again the shuddering seized upon her. She had been listening to him passively enough until he mentioned that name. “My mother! I am not strong—now,” she said, in a low voice. “There is no strength left in me—either of mind or body. Therefore I ask you to respect my weakness—to let me stand alone. Take your arms away. Thank you. That is better. . . . My mother!”

“Xaviera, does not my love give me the right to comfort you?”

She made no reply.

“Let me show you the way that leads beyond this misery. In my heart you will find rest. It shall be my daily care to teach you to forget—”

“Even if the way you led were into paradise, I can not go,” she said. “I may not follow. I would be a blight upon you. Do not urge me. I am conscious of the great honor you show me. I am conscious of the great pity that prompts one of your high moral standard to take the poor, forsaken being to the impregnable shelter of your roof and name. But not even that can tempt me. You are worthy of better things. As for me—To-day my wings were broken. I can no longer strive to pierce the

blue of lofty desires and high ambitions. There is nothing left me now but to steal quietly away—to hide my head in some forsaken corner. Is there such a place on the face of the earth? If I can but find it—if I can but find it!”

“I am not well acquainted with the ways of woman,” said Dr. Fawcett, gravely. “This was an unwise time to speak of such a thing—yet I thought it might help you to know that I suffer with you— This is Mrs. Thornton’s now. Come, *Xaviera*.”

They entered into the chamber of death, where the woman lay in perfect peace, her hands upon her quiet, pulseless breast, her lids closed decently. Beside her knelt, almost as motionless as she, *Magdalen Pomeroy*.

“She is dead?” asked *Xaviera*, almost indifferently.

Magdalen Pomeroy looked up.

“She died an hour ago—in my arms,” she said. “*Xaviera*, I have much to tell you—much to explain, much to ask forgiveness for. Will you think of me kindly, at least, until after my story is told?”

Xaviera bowed her head.

“So your will is broken, too, Aunt *Magdalen*?” she asked.

“Your will is broken, too?”

“Yes,” said *Magdalen Pomeroy*, adding: “And I am glad.”

“And mine,” said *Xaviera*, “and mine, also.” But she could not add words of gladness—yet. Human nature was too strong within her.

“You will leave us now,” said *Magdalen*. “I do not want you to stay here, *Xaviera*. You must go home. I shall spend the rest of this night alone—with my friend whom I lost, and whom I found again—whom indeed I found again.”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE STRUGGLE.

ALMOST mechanically, the girl said her prayers, disrobed, retired, moving softly, as if there were some reason for absolute quietness. That strange dulness of heart and brain was, above all things, the most merciful that could have befallen her. She drew the covers close about her, and lay there, gazing out of the window, staring up at the stars that twinkled in the vault of heaven, wondering, wondering, wondering.

Vaguely she asked herself what had come to her, why she was so passive when everything seemed gone out of her life—when all that she could see before her was a blank—a straight, uncompromising, dreary path. The way that led beyond was into desolation now.

Yet neither joy nor sorrow stirred within her. She stared out in that fashion until the lids closed over the too bright eyes and she slept. The shadows of the night lay thick and heavy on the little town—the mysterious, still shadow of those darkest hours that precede the dawn. For Xaviera dawn was breaking, and peace. But she knew it not. One thing above all others she had to learn—that no one can be self-sufficient—that no one dare say “I will,” without adding, “If it please Thee, Lord, my Master.” True, Xaviera had said these words—her lips had framed them, her mind had willed them. But the traits that were characteristic of her, the pride, the determination, the confidence

in herself, remained, despite apparent yielding to that higher power.

Is not that the way with us—with all of us? We ask Him to take all, take everything. Our lips frame the words, yes, even our hearts. We feel them. And even as we do so, we know that there is the same reliance on our own strength to do what we will, to shape our future as it pleases us. All among us who think to have the courage of our convictions, know how hard it is to yield—know how strong is the stubbornness of Adam.

And the quiet stars that had looked with pity on one girl's heartbreak, on the peaceful death of one loving soul, on the penitence of another long closed to thoughts of holiness—all these stars looked down now, their pale light illumining faintly the room of that girl who lay sleeping, tired out alike in mind and body, the deathlike sleep of exhaustion. The light could not penetrate into the chamber where Magdalen Pomeroy kept vigil beside the woman she had ignored so long, nor reach the beautiful face of the heartless creature who had refused to listen to the one call sacred above all others—the last beseeching prayer of a mother, whose dying breath had carried with her into eternity the name of "Muriel!"

God shows us, sometimes, as evidence of His mercy toward us, how hardened that heart may become that excludes Him from it. Pamela Danby's was one case. Even Magdalen Pomeroy, after the years that had crusted her proud nature with sins of hatred and dislike, could not forget, when death came, that Muriel Thornton had been dear to her. She wanted to sit beside this bed of death. She wanted to think over the past. She wanted to pour forth the bitterness of the years, her consciousness reaching upward, groping, groping, ever groping to that mysterious

silence which enveloped the soul of Muriel Thornton, confident that God would permit her to understand and to forgive.

For she had told her all.

With bowed head and folded hands she touched upon the past, and when the words were finished, the woman who had loved her always looked at her with eyes of pity and of tenderness.

"We could have borne it so much better," she said. "We could have borne it so much better—together. We could have helped each other. For I loved you." And then with those bright eyes still upon her, a smile parted her lips. "I love you still, Magdalen." Her hands clutched at the crucifix—by a great effort she brought it up, up, to her mouth. It fell, face down upon her bosom. "Muriel! My daughter Muriel!"

"I love you still, Magdalen!"

And,

"Muriel! My daughter Muriel!"

The patient soul had winged its flight from earth forever.

No wonder Magdalen Pomeroy wanted to be alone—to thank God for those dying words that had unsealed the fountain of tears and sent her down upon her knees beside the friend whom she would not forgive, and who had "loved her still." Sent her down on her knees before the patient God who had waited for her so long.

Heavier and heavier the deepening shadows grew. The dew fell on the sleeping leaves and lay thick on the heads of the slumbering flowers. Not a sound was heard save the sing-song chirping of the crickets, "busy shuttles of the summer night." Ever and anon a mysterious little zephyr filled the trees, disturbing leaf and branch, so that they drew closer together, murmuring as if in protest. But there was none abroad to hear, to feel,

that soft little murmuring zephyr that stirred them to sleepy speech.

And the soft little murmuring zephyr became an air, and the air a breeze, and the breeze a wind, stronger, and stronger, and stronger. The wind increased in volume. And what had first been the zephyr became a mighty gale, that blew out the twinkling of the tiny stars, one by one, sending low clouds in drifting, tumbling masses across the purple heavens. And then—through the blackness, the overwhelming blackness that hung furled above the earth, waiting but the moment to envelop it—then, then a delicate pink lit up the northern sky—a faint touch of color, soft, unreal, mystifying. So it hung, a vapor merely—until at last, like a scarlet rose, the flame cut through it—a long, sharp, wavering tongue of flame.

A sudden cry of alarm, many voices blending into one shout of terror, a bustling along the quiet, hilly streets, the pattering of feet, the hoarse calls of men, half-dressed, half-waking, who fled to the work of rescue—and then the alarm bells took up the theme. There were lives to save and there were homes to keep from destruction. Again and again the brazen peal rang forth; this, and the racing of the feet outside her window, roused the girl. She sat up, frightened, as one awakened from a bad dream, and drew the clothes around her tightly. It was no dream. The noise did not lessen. Above the babel, she heard the cry of fire—that dreadful cry, always one to fill the soul with terror and with fear.

Xaviera sprang from her bed immediately. Now indeed she was sure that the events of the past years were but the hideous fancies of a nightmare. Once, during her beloved brother's lifetime, she had been with him in a small Italian village, when, at

midnight, that dread cry roused them both. The horror of it had never quite faded from her mind, and the horror of it came upon her numbed soul now. Again she saw the terrible blaze and heard the shrieks of those whose dear ones were perishing; again she saw building after building reduced to ashes, while the men who would gladly have helped stood by with impotent hands, rendered powerless by lack of water. Bewildered and confused *Xaviera* sat there, thinking of the past.

"Frank!" she called. "Frank, my brother, where are you, where are you? Brother, brother!"

She realized her surroundings then—and the old-time, first, keenest grief of her bereavement came upon her. She turned, throwing herself on the bed, her face buried in the pillows.

"My brother!" she sobbed, in bitter, dry gaspings that seemed to rend her whole frame. And again: "My brother, my brother, my brother!" more bitterly and hopelessly still.

There came the patter of bare feet along the hall. Her aunt's voice trembled outside the door.

"*Xaviera*! Wake up, wake up, child! The hotel is burning, and *Magdalen* has not slept in her room all night. *Xaviera*! Wake up! Open! It is *Winifred*, your aunt *Winifred*."

The girl raised herself, and admitted the ashen-faced, trembling little woman.

"Where is *Magdalen*?" were her first words. "Such a thing has never happened to us before. Never. She has never spent a night outside this house. Where can she have gone— Speak to me, *Xaviera*! Do not stand there like a frozen creature—a being of snow. *Xaviera*—"

"Aunt *Magdalen* is with my grandmother. She died to-night," said *Xaviera*, in an expressionless tone.

Winifred fell back against the door, clasping her hands together.

"You know?" she asked, breathlessly.

"I know," said Xaviera. "I know—Aunt Winifred."

"Not—all?"

"All—everything."

"Dear heart," said Aunt Winifred, pitifully. "Magdalen—"

"Went of her own free will," said Xaviera. "And was with her when she died."

"Ah!" said Aunt Winifred, her breath catching in her throat. "I am glad it was so before Muriel died. Listen, Xaviera! What dreadful cries! I am afraid to stay here without Magdalen." The timid soul of the woman, controlled always by the more powerful sister, spoke in those words. "Let us go, Xaviera? Let us go find Magdalen. Let us see—"

"Dress yourself," said Xaviera. "We will go together."

Ten minutes afterward they joined the stream of people who had been roused by the ringing of the bells and the great alarm. The fire, starting in the hotel—some said in the very rooms where the singer had entertained her guests—had gained considerable headway. The whole building was ablaze now, and the guests who had escaped were searching distractedly for relatives and friends amid the confused ring of spectators, or bemoaning lost valuables. There was no order. And now there came the greatest horror of all. The wind, suddenly veering, carried the flames directly across the heart of the town. Two of the neighboring cottages had already caught.

It was so like the scene that Xaviera had once before witnessed that she could scarcely persuade herself that she was awake. She watched, with wide, dark eyes, the peril of those who ventured

to fight this ever-increasing danger. So keen was this impression that when a man pressed his way to her side, extending a strong arm to keep back the crowd, that she grasped at it with tremulous fingers.

"Isn't it awful?" she said, just as she had said it years before. "Isn't it terrible? What will they do, Frank? The poor souls!"

The man did not answer.

"Such a wind!" went on Xaviera. "It will destroy the whole town if something is not done at once. What a disaster!"

"There!" said Edgar Fawcett's voice. "The Fanning house has caught—there is not enough water. Xaviera!" He turned to her suddenly. "They have sent telegrams to Bayardstown and Corning—help will not be long in coming. But my house lies directly in the path of the flames—will you take my keys and save the manuscripts and papers in my desk? Save them before you do anything else—they are very precious to me. The old housekeeper will show you where the desk is."

"But you—" began Xaviera, a little startled.

"I stay here, of course," he said. "Go with your niece, Miss Pomeroy," he continued. He was anxious now to save the much-tried girl from the scenes he knew were to follow on the heels of this disaster. Already they were shouting his name, calling for his help, and he knew that Xaviera would want to assist also if she remained. She had suffered sufficiently.

Gray and colorless the morning broke. At dawn aid arrived from the neighboring town, and with their ranks thus augmented the citizens soon had the fire under control. The wind abated considerably, but it was chill and cold, and a fine rain had set in. Dr. Fawcett started to work in earnest when he saw Xaviera

disappear. He was everywhere at once, giving orders and directing the rescuers. Not until the first help arrived from Corning did he give himself a moment's rest, and would not have taken it then had not a physician been among them.

It was seven o'clock before he turned his face toward home—a weary, smoke-grimed face it was. His handkerchief was wrapped about a severe burn on one of his hands and the whole side of his coat was gone. When he opened the door and entered the hall he scarcely recognized his own house. Almost by a miracle it had escaped with a scorching—and now the hall was filled with those who had been rendered homeless. They overflowed into the parlor, back into the dining-room; they were sitting on the stairs. He looked about him in amazement. Some of them were weeping. Some of them were half-asleep. Then, raising his head, he met Xaviera's questioning glance, and he knew that she had brought them here for refuge. He smiled. Was not all that he possessed her very own? And was not everything she did well done? To him that white face was superhuman in its beauty.

"Come, St. Elizabeth," said he. "Bestow of your tireless assistance upon one who needs it sorely. Leave Aunt Winifred and Sara to attend to these."

She hesitated. He held up his bandaged hand and she came to him immediately.

"You are hurt?"

"No; not hurt." He paused, looking at her keenly. "And you—how do you feel?"

"A little tired," she confessed. "But whether of heart or body I have not had time to find out."

"Are they—everywhere?" he asked, with a smile, indicating

the people about him. "Haven't you saved me some little corner, Xaviera?"

"Yes—your study. No one is in there. I have locked it."

"Come with me, then. I would ask you something, Xaviera."

He took her arm and led her through the parlor, smiling and nodding in friendly fashion as he passed. Then, as she unlocked the door he threw it open and motioned that she should precede him.

"You will not—"

She ventured the question hurriedly.

"And if I did? Could one find fault with me?" he asked.

"Ah, Xaviera, all here in Segrovia who know you—"

"Will not know me long."

"You still intend to go away?"

She glanced at him, surprised.

"Yes."

"Where will you go?"

"As far from here as my strength will carry me—to Italy—
But no, not to Italy, where the happiest hours of my life were spent! Not to Italy, but to some far, far-distant, stranger land—"

"Nothing can keep you?"

"Why?" she questioned. "What should keep me here? I found neither home, nor home-love; no affection save that of the woman who is dead, and those two little children—one of whom met his death through me."

"Absurdity!" said Dr. Fawcett. "You are not in your right senses."

"If I had not come to Segrovia," said Xaviera, impressively, "Allison Frayer would never have come. Had he not come, Danny would have been alive to-day."

"And I consider your coming a direct answer to Muriel Thornton's life of prayer."

Xaviera shook her head.

"Prove it to me—she died with silent lips. She would not even acknowledge our relationship."

"For your sake—as she told me, and as I shall prove to you. You do not know how much she loved you, Xaviera, or what a temptation it was to her to tell you that story and claim you for her very own."

Xaviera was silent.

"Besides, you have made a place for yourself in Segrovia that will be hard to fill. You must stay, Xaviera."

Argument was useless—but she smiled, and he knew what little effect the words had on her.

"It is the wish of my heart to keep you, dear," he said, tenderly. "Xaviera, you love me."

"No," she said.

"You do not love me? Again, what absurdity! Come, come, come! You know what I am longing to say. Once this day I asked you to let me help you bear the sorrow that has come upon you. You do love me—and until you find it out, I shall be satisfied with whatever you can give."

Her dark eyes glistened. She came closer to him.

"You are a good, a noble man," she said. "But you are wronging yourself. If I respected you less I might be moved by your pleading—but I may not. Love, love—it is buried in that one grave which holds the bodies of the two dearest to me on earth. Dr. Fawcett, since that time I have not been capable of feeling. Affection I gave to Muriel Thornton, and to the Bernard children, and to those about me—even to you, because

you are so true, and so good! But love! I am cold—cold to the innermost recesses of my being!”

A great joy swept across the man's dark face as he listened. His shoulders seemed freed from a heavy burden.

“Oh, that is it,” he said. “That!”

“So there is naught to keep me here,” she said. “You will soon forget. And I am going to-day—this very afternoon, if possible—”

“I shall settle the time and the place for you,” he said, in a quiet, determined tone.

“You?” asked Xaviera, in surprise. She looked at him, proudly. Then her heart smote her at her own unkindness. “Very well, for the time being, you may.” She turned to leave the room, but his voice arrested her.

“Xaviera—will you— I have something else— I want to tell you—”

“Yes?”

“Do not look at me in that manner.” He was suddenly embarrassed. “Child, I— It is about—”

“About—”

“Your mother!”

The girl put up her hands with the gesture he had seen her use once before that morning. The words stung her.

“O God!” she said.

“She is still alive,” said Dr. Fawcett, gently. “Xaviera—”

“I can not,” she said, wringing her hands. “I can not—I dare not. I who asked that she might know what it was to die alone—”

“She will—unless you go to her,” said the man. “It is only the question of a few hours.”

"Dr. Fawcett!" and again she twisted her fingers as if in torture. "You know—you have seen— It is not right to ask me. Care for her—you must care for her. I can not, oh, I can not. There is nothing in my breast but aversion, horror—there is no affection. I am afraid of the fire in my own bosom—do not fan it into flame. It will consume me. I am not cruel—I am not wicked. But I shall be both if you insist. Do not, do not. See, I am only Xaviera Pomeroy, the musician, who is alone in the world, whose mother died when she was very young—oh, so very young, and who lies buried in Italian soil. Do not ask her—"

"Death is standing at her side—death in its foulest form—death of body and of soul."

Xaviera shuddered.

"I said that your coming here was God's answer to Muriel Thornton's life of prayer. Had you not come, Allison Frayer would not have come—he would not have been here to send for the woman whom he thought would sting your proud soul to desperation. And had he not sent for her she would not now be locked in the unconsciousness that precedes death—from which, if you can rouse her, will come the salvation of her immortal soul—the soul that Muriel Thornton begged of Heaven so long. She awaits the hospitality of your roof—she is lying at your door. For Magdalen Pomeroy will not permit her to enter there until you, Xaviera, say the word. Xaviera, give your consent—I am waiting for it. She is your mother—for years that poor old soul lying in the clasp of death this day wept and prayed for her erring child. God is waiting for the yielding of your heart, Xaviera—"

* * * * *

As they bore that figure up the stairs, and laid it on Xaviera's own white bed, the most hardened man among them could not

but look upon it with eyes of pity. The whole lower part of the body had been burned to a crisp—the beautiful golden hair was a black, unlovely mass. Even the face had not been spared, nothing but the mouth that had mocked at the girl who was her daughter—and which was drawn into dreadful lines of pain.

“It would be well if she could die without regaining her senses,” said Dr. Fawcett, pityingly, “if it were not for that soul of hers. You will remember that, Miss Winifred?”

“We will remember that,” said Magdalen Pomeroy.

She looked very much shaken in the morning light, but there was a steadfast gleam in the sunken eyes, and a quiet curve to her mouth that it had not known in many restless years.

So he left Magdalen and Winifred to take care of the sufferer and went downstairs. He stood beside Xaviera, who was gazing out into the street, her arms folded across her breast, her forehead pressed against the pane. If she heard him enter she gave no sign.

“Xaviera!” he said. “Xaviera!”

She did not move.

“Xaviera!” His voice lingered on the name lovingly.

She unlocked her arms then, and turned toward him. Her face was burning.

“Oh, stay!” she said, beseechingly, for her strength was gone. “Stay, stay with me.”

“I can not,” he answered. “There are too many waiting for me—too many who need me. Besides— You are going?”

She shuddered.

“No, no—not now.”

“You will stay—”

"Until it is ended," she finished, drearily. "It is the last of the chapter. I must read the closing words."

"And they will be in characters of gold. Muriel Thornton—"

"It was the thought of Muriel Thornton—for Muriel Thornton's sake!" She could not continue. Then: "I am wicked, wicked, wicked!"

"No, no," he said, hurriedly. "In after years you will remember this with gratitude and joy. It will be a memory you would not relinquish for any other—that Muriel Thornton's spirit lived in you long enough to save that erring soul."

"Save it?" She smiled. He leaned over her.

"Xaviera," he said, impressively. "God lives. He will show you what you are to do,"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SAVING OF PAMELA DANBY.

It was an awful day.

The hours dragged by on leaden feet. Magdalen and Winifred sat beside the dying woman, striving in every way possible to ease the agony from which she suffered. They could do but little, for all their solicitude. Once she did become conscious, looked with dread eyes of pain into both their faces, and relapsed again into a comatose state.

Xaviera had not been able to take a moment's rest. With Father Powers beside her she had gone up to the room that held the woman who was her mother—venturing into it with timid steps. Father Powers knew her own sore need of comfort, and his heart ached for her. She leaned against the wall, her eyes riveted upon the face that had once been so lovely. So she stood all that long afternoon, with folded hands. What sins had not that woman taken upon herself? What wickedness had she not committed? If she could but realize their enormity long enough to repent of them, to throw herself in spirit at the feet of that merciful Saviour who had died for love of her. If, if, if! What grace, what mighty grace was necessary to move that estranged heart?

Winifred sat reading aloud the prayers for the dying, Magdalen with bowed head, listening, and the girl stared at them both, as if fascinated. Were these petitions strong enough to

reach the heart of God—to touch Him for this woman who had despised Him ever and always, who had shirked her noblest responsibilities? And then she remembered Muriel Thornton.

“It will not last long now—it can not,” said Magdalen Pomeroy.

“You still here, daughter?” It was Father Powers. He touched her arm. “You are exhausting your strength unnecessarily.”

Xaviera stared at him.

“She will die, I am afraid, without ever coming back,” he said. Then, under his breath, “Oh, it is a sad thing to see a soul slipping away like this—and such a soul!”

A thought, so bright, so wonderful, came to Xaviera, then, that it seemed as if God had sent it. “He lives,” Dr. Fawcett had said. “He will show you what you are to do.” It pierced the clouds about her brain, it roused her from her apathy. She moved from her position against the wall, turning quickly to the corner of the room. Tearing aside a little curtain, she lifted an object from behind it. They stared at her, thinking her mind was wandering. Unbuttoning the green cloth cover she let it fall away from the polished strings of the harp that was now exposed for the first time in many months to other eyes than her very own.

“What would you do?” asked Winifred, fearfully. “The woman is dying, Xaviera, dying. Pray for her.”

“I shall,” said Xaviera. “I shall pray.”

She ran her fingers across the strings. There was neither timidity nor hesitation now—only breadth and power. Her eyes kindled. Into her cheeks had come two vivid spots of scarlet.

“Help me, Frank,” she whispered. “She is our mother.” Softly as the last sigh of a departing spirit the melody that Dr.

Fawcett had evoked from the violin, trying to touch Pamela Danby's heart through her one passion, music—the dead artist's wonderful “Message”—filled the room. “It had been too sad—Frank was to finish it,” Xaviera had said—but she played it now as she would have had him finish it—the childish laughter, the tenderness, the pain, with the call of victory at the end. The pain was there, but after a while it died away, was lost in the increasing volume of sound. It was like the voice of a spirit, bright, sweet, pure, insistent. Human misery had no place in it, nor human complaining. There was room for nothing but glory of triumph—joy—heaven itself.

Her fingers fell away, her body stumbled against the instrument—but Magdalen Pomeroy caught her as she fell, and held her. Winifred sat with folded hands, closed eyes. She had forgotten her surroundings. The eyelids of the dying woman trembled. Father Powers bent over her.

“She is conscious; thank God, thank God!” burst from his parted lips. He held a crucifix before her. “Look upon your Saviour! Ask God to be merciful! Ask Him to spare you! You repent—you are sorry. ‘O my God, I am most heartily sorry—’”

“O—my—God—” her lips moved faintly. “I am sorry. For—all—my—sins—”

He finished the act of contrition with her, the tears streaming down his face. His hands moved above her in absolution.

“Mercy!” said the dying woman.

“My dear child, yes,” said Father Powers. “Think upon His love—”

“Mercy!” she implored again, in a voice of anguish. “Jesus! Have mercy on my soul!”

Winifred was on her knees, praying aloud. Magdalen stood

as if carved in stone, with Xaviera's unconscious form in her clasp.

"It is over," said Magdalen, then.

Father Powers looked at the white and senseless face of the girl.

"Not yet," he said, gravely. "Not yet. The worst may still be to come."

* * * * *

And for a while, they, who had grown to care for Xaviera in her banishment, thought that the worst had come. She was dragged back from the door of death by their efforts. And there were many of them. Mrs. Browne and Phyllis and Constance Waverly—"who could do little but pray," she averred, with tear-wet eyes. Aunt Magdalen guarded her jealously, and Aunt Winifred wore herself out—which was Aunt Winifred's patient way. Dr. Fawcett—well, hers was the dearest life in the world to him, dearer than his own, by far. He won, at last. But it was a struggle.

It was the first time she had been allowed to see any of her friends—her first day downstairs. Phyllis Gordon, sparkling and happy, sat holding her thin hand in affectionate clasp.

"You will soon get your strength back, now that you can move about at all," she was saying. "Is is so good to see you up, Xaviera. And I—"

"What of you?"

"I shall be in New York in six weeks' time."

"You!" Xaviera looked at her in surprise. "You are going to your aunt—"

"Aunt Isabel?" Phyllis laughed contentedly. "Oh, no. I am going to my own home this time. Dick couldn't stand it any

longer—and when he read that Segrovia had been almost burned to the ground—well, he realized how much he cared, then. It was a lie,” she went on, confidently, “they saying that he was engaged to Sylvia. He wasn’t engaged at all—until now.”

And she blushed prettily. Xaviera looked at her with a pleased smile.

“Happy at last!” she said. “For an unromantic, prosaic, money-loving little shepherdess, you have been very, very true to your Strephon, dear. He is a fortunate swain.”

“Oh, he has enough money,” declared Phyllis. “That is one thing to be grateful for. I could have forgotten in time—but it was hard.”

“You would have taken him were he as poor as poverty,” said Xaviera. “I suppose all the others were merely substitutes, then, to appease the real heart-hunger?”

“Material—rough material,” laughed Phyllis.

“And Dr. Fawcett—”

“Oh, Dr. Fawcett! You haven’t seen Dick! There never was any one like Dick, never, never! And you’ll say so when you see him. May he come to-morrow?”

“May who come to-morrow?” put in an earnest voice. “My patient’s first day downstairs, and already— What, Miss Phyllis—you want to bring in that stalwart chap I’ve seen you parading with about the village? No, no—Xaviera shall not take any such risks. And if I am not mistaken he’s at the end of the street now, lounging up against a post with the most disconsolate—”

“Good-by, Xaviera,” said Phyllis, bending to kiss her friend. “You might as well confess the truth,” she said, audaciously to the grave-faced doctor. “Madam Butterfly is in the way.”

Xaviera leaned her dark head against the back of the chair, tired, but smiling.

"You can be proud of the transformation you've affected in that soulless little gadabout," said Dr. Fawcett, in his brusque manner. "It is all your doing, Miss Pomeroy."

"I have been waiting for you," she said. "Waiting for you all day."

"Yes?" He had been walking up and down the room, carelessly. Now he stopped, contemplating the back of her head. "Why?"

"When may I travel? To-morrow?"

"To-morrow?" He laughed. "No, nor to-morrow, nor to-morrow, nor the morrow after that."

"What!" she exclaimed. "But you do not mean it."

"You are in no condition to travel—you are aware of that much, at any rate."

"Not far," she protested. "Just to leave Segrovia."

"Just to leave your friends," he said, bitterly.

"No," she made answer. "No. I shall carry my friends with me—in the heart that came to me the day my mother died. It is a very meek heart now, Dr. Fawcett."

"That remains to be proven."

The answer was not encouraging.

"I have a request to make," she began, hesitatingly. "Elizabeth—"

"Has been with me since Danny's death. I intend to keep her with me until you want her, Xaviera."

"I shall not want her—she will be better off with you," said Xaviera. She turned her head, trying to see his face. "There is one other thing—"

"I was to decide the place, you remember?" said Dr. Fawcett, steadily. "I rather thought that stubborn heart—which has grown so wondrous meek!—would not yield the point so easily. So I have written to a dear old friend of mine. She lives on the road to Bayardstown—not very far away, but her house stands alone on the top of a hill, and you will find all the solitude you need. She is a quiet woman, who has had much sorrow, and you need never speak to her, or even see her, unless you wish it. Does this please you?"

"I do not know why you are so good to me, I do not know why," she said. "I feel unhappy now that I must make another request—for your own sake, this time."

"And that is—"

"You must not come—while I am there." She spoke in a low tone that trembled despite her effort at calm, and her eyes were troubled.

His face grew pale.

"You need not be afraid," he said. "I shall not cross your path. You know what my feelings are regarding you." His chest heaved, his nostrils dilated. "Well, so be it. Under no circumstances shall I seek you ever, unless—"

What made him so confident, so proud? There was a power about this man that Xaviera had failed to reckon with—a power that overwhelmed her. He looked into her eyes. She had seen that look once before—the night on which he had played her brother's masterpiece, and then, turning to her, had sought to penetrate the secrets of her soul. She was frightened at the torrent of feeling that swept over her.

And he, rising almost triumphantly, left the room.

* * * * *

Mrs. Clarke-Richmond's rambling old mansion, built in the Colonial style, was truly a beautiful home, and the lady herself such a chatelain as one would scarcely expect to find in so lonely and cloistered a habitation. At first, Xaviera's longing for solitude served her well. During those long autumn days she got close to the heart of Mother Nature—who offers so much to weary brains and aching souls. Some days passed in which she saw her hostess only at meals. She had known her own requirements better than any other, and gradually, in this atmosphere, she recovered her mental equipoise.

After a while, as the weeks sped on, and the days grew shorter, and darkness fell so very early on the quiet country she had grown to love, she found that Mrs. Clarke-Richmond was an educated and a lovable woman, and that she could sit for hours poring over the volumes with which her library was stocked, without opening her lips. This appealed to Xaviera. And from this sympathy and mutual love of reading there sprang a sweeter and deeper sentiment—so that now they were glad to see each other, exchanging opinions that were but the open sesame to more complete knowledge of character.

"I have often wondered why a woman of your culture can bear to stay here alone," said Xaviera. She was sitting in the library as usual, and they had been discussing one of Dickens' Christmas stories.

"And you?"

"I—have always been different to other women."

"Have you?" and Mrs. Richmond smiled. "There is a natural longing, when deep sorrow touches you, to get away from people."

"Yes," said Xaviera.

"I was once the gayest woman ever came from England to this free country of yours. It is only a short story, dear. I was beloved, I married—and one died. That is all."

"Enough," said the girl, sententiously. "That is enough. How strange the lives of most of us are. And yet we read fiction and wonder and wonder and cry out at the unreality of it. There were three of us—and two died," she added simply. It was the nearest approach to confidence that had ever passed between them.

"Two died! But not your husband."

"No, my father. my brother, whom I loved," said Xaviera. "Both."

"Ah, well!"

The girl leaned forward.

"Listen," she said. "You tell me you are English—an Englishwoman. Did you ever hear of Lord Allison Frayer?"

"So you know Lord Allison Frayer?"

"Yes."

"He is Lady Anne Frayer's son—and Anne Frayer, his mother, was my sister."

"Then this is the house on the hill!" Xaviera sat back suddenly. A smile stole across her face—a smile in recognition of and in resignation to the sense of her own helplessness in the hands of the Power that controlled her life and actions. "He has been here, then?"

"Once. He was on his way to the mountains for the shooting—with a friend, or to a friend—I can not remember which."

"I knew the house—when first I came to stay with you. Last year on my way to Segrovia the train was delayed—boulders had fallen on the track. I came up the path—I looked in at your window. I saw Lord Allison Frayer."

"You do not like him?"

"I am indifferent," said Xaviera. "Now," she added, as an after thought.

They said no more. Mrs. Richmond went back to her book, but Xaviera could not read. How much or how little the older woman knew of her story did not affect her. She was simply wondering to herself at the strange way in which all the threads were lifted, one by one, and woven into the web that made her life. Suddenly Mrs. Richmond took up a note from the table in front of her.

"I forgot to mention to you that I had received a letter from Dr. Fawcett," she said. "I admire that man very much—and it will be the first time he has ever failed to visit me at Christmas. Here he writes, without a line of excuse, that he will not be able to come this year." She was distinctly aggrieved.

"Did Dr. Fawcett know that Lord—Frayer was your relative?" asked Xaviera. Her face flushed.

"Dr. Fawcett—I do not believe I ever mentioned his name. Why? Do you think it would interest Dr. Fawcett?"

Xaviera had no chance to reply. A servant came along the hall.

"A gentleman to see Miss Pomeroy."

The girl rose hurriedly. It was Dr. Fawcett surely! And she was glad, glad! He had come, then, and he wished to see her first—to see her first—before his old friend! A happy light sprang to her face. Yes, she was glad that he had come, and she would tell him so.

The man was standing with his back to the door. At the rustling of her garments he turned. She gave a low cry—it was Allison Frayer.

"You!" she said. "You!" The disappointment made her voice tremble. "How did you find your way?"

"It is no use, Xaviera," he said. "I must come to you—I can not stay away." His tones were low, hopeless.

"Sit down," said Xaviera. "You must have had a trying journey from Segrovia here. Traveling at this time is none too pleasant."

"I did not mind," he said. "I came back to Segrovia three months ago—no one would tell me anything about you. Only by chance I heard from little Elizabeth. You know who Mrs. Clarke-Richmond is?"

"Yes," said Xaviera.

"I thought that I would make one last effort—so that we might part friends."

"Of what use?" asked Xaviera, in an expressionless voice. "Of what use?" she repeated, looking at him with eyes of cold displeasure.

"No," he said. "You shall not look at me in that way. I do not intend to renew the past. But I would ask you to give me the memory of one happy hour to carry away with me before I go out of your life forever. When you will you can entertain. You dislike me—you have had cause to hate me. Put dislike and hatred aside. Try to imagine that you have forgiven me."

"I will try," said Xaviera, in a low voice. "I will call Mrs. Richmond now. After that—"

On the whole they spent an enjoyable evening, for Xaviera endeavored to comply with her visitor's strange request. Mrs. Richmond, ever courteous, and glad—outwardly at least—to see her kinsman, seconded Xaviera's efforts. She successfully concealed her surprise at the oddness of this unexpected visit.

"I shall have to say good-by with my good-night," said Allison Frayer. "I never expect to see America again—and it was but natural I should want to call on you for one last, long conversation ere I left." He bowed courteously to Mrs. Richmond as he spoke. "We are almost strangers—yet we can not set aside the claims of kinship."

"No," said Mrs. Richmond—but her glance followed his eyes—which turned to Xaviera, as if he could not see enough of the pale face that was so soon to be beyond the range of his vision forever. And when the older woman left the room—for the evening wore away rapidly—he still sat gazing at her.

"When I see you in that black gown you seem to me like an abbess or a nun—so holy are you. A light seems shining on your forehead. Xaviera, I shall always remember you as you are now—in that black dress with the cross upon your bosom."

Xaviera touched the cross—then raised her face to his.

"Do you recollect what that diamond cross commemorates?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "My brother Frank gave it to me—a gift on the occasion of our betrothal."

"Our betrothal! Great God, Xaviera! Which I broke!"

"Which you broke."

He clenched his hands. Words trembled on his tongue. But she looked at him proudly as of old.

"I have treated you fairly well for one to whom I owe so little," she said. "Therefore, do not forget your promise. You shall not speak to me again in that way. I will not tolerate it."

"Good-night, Xaviera."

"Good-night, Lord Frayer."

“And good-by.”

“Good-by—I hope. It will be better for you a thousand times. You were unwise to come.”

“No,” he said. “No matter where the way leads now I have deserved the pain. Good-by, Xaviera.”

* * * * *

“With the cross upon my breast,” said Xaviera. And she smiled—the tremulous, faint, sweet smile of dawning joy. “The cross upon my breast—and the crown of a good man’s love in my heart! Forever and forever!”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WAY THAT LED BEYOND.

"AND this Christmas Eve!"

"And this is Christmas Eve!"

Xaviera echoed the words. She had been waiting for her kind friend to come down from her room—and now Mrs. Richmond entered with a bundle of mail in her hands, and these words upon her lips.

"Letters, letters, letters!" she said. "Such letters! William scarcely finds so much treasure at the post office. Letters from your aunts and from New York, and from—"

"From—" Xaviera bent forward eagerly.

"A letter from Dr. Fawcett—for me," said Mrs. Richmond.

The light died out of Xaviera's face. "For you?" she faltered.

"You expected one?" Her friend looked at her in surprise.

"He has been so kind—I thought—"

Mrs. Richmond glanced at her keenly.

"I had rather he came than wrote to me—or sent me any gift," she said then. "He knows how I count on seeing him this day. I am much annoyed."

Xaviera's lips quivered.

"It is I who have kept him away," she stammered. "It is my fault."

Mrs. Richmond put her arm around the girl.

"Edgar Fawcett loves you—is that it?"

"He did," said Xaviera, in a low voice.

"And—you?"

"Not—at that time."

"But—now?"

No answer.

"Would it not be well to make a little sacrifice for his sake?
There are times when pride—"

"I wrote to him a week ago. After Lord Frayer left."

"Telling him to come?"

"Yes. That you expected him. That I, also, would be glad.
I do not know what I wrote."

"It is not your will, then, that keeps him away?"

"No, no, it is his own."

"He will come," said Mrs. Richmond, confidently. "He will
come. Do you know, Xaviera, that lately you have been very
much more natural—more human, if one can use that word in
connection with you?"

"I am much happier," said Xaviera. "Perhaps it is because
the necessity for self-repression no longer exists."

"That is it," said Mrs. Richmond. "At first I was afraid to
leave you so much alone—you stole about so quietly and so
silently and with such a queer expression in your eyes. But all
that is past now," she said, "and this is Christmas-time. We
have no room for sadness because of the very joy of this holy
season."

* * * * *

Magdalen Pomeroy had written to her niece.

It had taken her old fingers a long time to pen the words.
She had hesitated often, Xaviera could see as she read them, but

the story of the past was put before her—the story she had not cared to hear at the time she left Segrovia. And now, of her own free will, her aunt cleared up the mystery that had so perplexed and annoyed her. And simply told, it made a simple tale.

“I was much older than Frank—fully fifteen years, and a mother to the lad always,” said the letter. “I had meant to do many things in the world, but when, in dying, my mother gave him to my keeping, my whole life changed.

“I offered him to God.

“How carefully I watched his footsteps I think you are aware—for he himself has told you of it. But it was always with one end in view, and that end the altar.

“Frank must be a priest.

“How this notion came to me I do not know. It was a wicked notion, that I see—who was I that would dare to control a man’s whole life? At first I prayed that it might be. But I was not humble enough. Afterward, losing sight of God’s will in the matter, the desire became fixed—immovable. The mere possibility that the child would not adopt that vocation never struck me. The longing became part of me.

“I made few friends—you are like me there, Xaviera. But Muriel Wilson was the dearest—the only one. I might as well confess that William Thornton was my lover—not alone at the time when I, a girl of seventeen, took charge of Frank, but afterward. Until I told him I would never marry—never. Then he left me. I loved him, Xaviera, I loved him. But I loved Frank more. And Winifred, too, was but a child. . . .

“Muriel Wilson left Segrovia. He went also. Four years later she wrote, telling me that she and William Thornton were

promised. My heart ached a little. That was natural. But I was rather glad than otherwise. I loved him, and I loved her.

"But I loved Frank more. . . .

"We corresponded regularly. She was very happy. One daughter was born to her—then William Thornton died. I sent Frank to college; he was clever, talented, a genius, they wrote me. Muriel's life grew harder. The girl gave her a great deal of trouble. A born mimic, an exquisite singer. Some one had told her to go in training for the stage. The mother's heart was sore.

"I wrote to Muriel, telling her to come back to Segrovia, away from the city and its temptations. Here, where things were quieter and life ran smoothly, and where she would be among her old friends and those who loved her.

"Well, she came. She came, and brought her daughter with her.

"Child, you have seen Pamela Danby, as she called herself, and you know how beautiful she was. Think what her loveliness must have been at sixteen, in the first dawn of girlhood. I, who seldom cared to look a second time at a woman, was dumbfounded that first glance I had of her. The poor mother could do nothing. She idolized the girl. She could not control her, for her slightest wish was law. Often and often I advised Muriel against letting her have so much of her headstrong way. No use.

"Then my boy came home—my boy—my pride.

"I see the wickedness of it now. He did not want the life I had planned for him, ever. If I had let him be. But no. I must talk and talk of the future. And supposing that for my sake, he had done as I wished, Xaviera. I see with clearer eyes now. God has been merciful.

"But the worst happened, then, according to my perverted

vision. Frank and Muriel loved each other. He met her all that summer. I saw nothing. No one told me. I was too confident. I never dreamed of such a thing.

"Afterward—I blamed my friend. You shall hear. She must have been aware. . . .

"One morning I found Frank's letter on the table in my room—a letter telling me that he and Muriel had left Segrovia the night before, intending to go directly to Bayardstown and get married. I shall never forget that morning, Xaviera. I laughed at the joke—laughed until I cried, and then went about the house, calling to my darling, telling him what a mad prank it was—this that he was playing on his sister, threatening to scold him well for his nonsense.

"No answer came, Xaviera. No answer ever came. I have never seen him since—never.

"I got afraid after awhile. I thought I would go to Muriel, to tell her what an escapade Frank was planning to frighten me. I found her coming to meet me.

"She told me the truth, then. She told me of the friendship existing between the boy and girl. But she had never expected that there would be anything serious come of it. The girl was so young. Such a child. And the end was—this!

"Blind, foolish, mad, I had been indeed! Mad and foolish and blind! I blamed her for it all. I laid the frustration of my hopes upon her shoulders, crushing her to the earth. I said bitter things, cruel things, and she bore them meekly, for she was ever patient and forbearing. First my lover, and now my more than child, she had taken from me! I told her that until the day I died I would never cross her threshold, never willingly look upon her face. I told her that she was to hold herself accountable

for all. I put it all upon her. I told her that if my boy's soul were lost it would be through her.

"She looked at me, Xaviera, with the same look in her patient eyes that I saw in them the night she died. I shall never forget it. And when I had finished venting my rage, she bowed her head, the tears streaming down her face. Did I care, think you, that her own heart was sore for the ungrateful girl who had left her without one word of farewell? Not I.

"Xaviera, it is not well to give way to such thoughts as burned in my soul then. God punished me my lifetime for them. I would not submit. I defied fate. I defied God Himself. I bade God leave me, since He had taken all hope away from me!

"Oh, you know how bitter I was. It lasted all these weary, weary years—and each year saw me worse instead of better. I had thrust all holy things back into the past. The girl who had used my boy as a stepping-stone to the life she craved, cast him off when it best suited her. He wrote to me, telling me of his children, now worse than motherless. I think I was glad, then, glad. And yet I longed to see him. Alas, alas, alas! What would I say when our mother asked his soul of me?

* * * * *

"Long afterward you came. You were quiet and still and calm. But you opened all the wound. You had your mother's carriage, for all your likeness to myself, and her voice, her intonation. Xaviera, I hated you and I loved you. I was torn between affection and repulsion.

"Then I found out you visited Muriel.

"The crowning bitterness! What has happened since that time you know. Muriel's death, and your mother's—and I am left. Alone! You would not stay, Xaviera, you would not stay—

because I was so cruel, so cruel, so cruel! Can you not forgive me? Speak the words of forgiveness to me this Christmas-time, and I think I shall know the meaning of joy again.

"Do not let me weary you. I drove you away from us by my miserable passion. Come back, if only for one hour. To one who loves you for your father's sake, and for your own, with all the strength left her. I am lonely, *Xaviera*."

The tears were standing in *Xaviera's* eyes as she finished.

* * * * *

Night had settled upon Segrovia when the train reached the station, and *Xaviera* was glad, for the most unaccountable excitement seized her. Nor was it her anticipated meeting with Aunt Magdalen that sent the blood racing through her veins as she walked along the old, familiar street, along the old, familiar path.

She need not pass his house to reach Aunt Magdalen's—there was a shorter cut, and for a moment pride stood at her elbow, urging her to avoid him until he sought her. But she set her teeth. Deliberately and resolutely, then, she chose the path that led along the upper street. Her steps dragged as she came near the house she knew so well—she scarcely had courage to pass it, although the gate was closed, and only a faint streak of light seemed to pierce through the shuttered windows. Her breath left her. With shaking knees she put out her hand and clutched at the fence to steady herself, a feeling of shame surging through her whole body.

And then, though she had not heard him nor seen his approach, he stood before her. With sudden fright she strove to pass him.

"You want Dr. Fawcett?" asked those well-remembered tones.

Silence reigned about them. She could hear her heart throbbing. The moonlight, striking on the dazzling snow, fell, too, with radiant kisses upon the cross that shone upon her bosom.

With an inarticulate cry he bent over her.

"Xaviera!" he said. "Xaviera?" in such a questioning, beseeching voice that she raised her face to his.

"I am here," she said.

He put his arms about her.

"We meet sooner than I anticipated," he said. "For I meant to hold you so this night if I had to walk the distance from Segrovia to Bayardstown. You came to me—of—your—own—free—will."

"No," she said, huskily. "Not of my own free will."

"What then? Whatever brought you I shall bless the moment that gave you to me."

"Your will," she murmured. "I am no longer strong as when you knew me first."

"Xaviera, you love me then?" He spoke almost exultantly. "You love me?"

"On my breast the cross, and in my heart the crown of a good man's love," she whispered. "Oh, I do, I do! The perilous way beyond was the way that led me to you—"

"Beyond, upward, ever onward—into the light of peace and joy forever," he said. "Thank God."

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